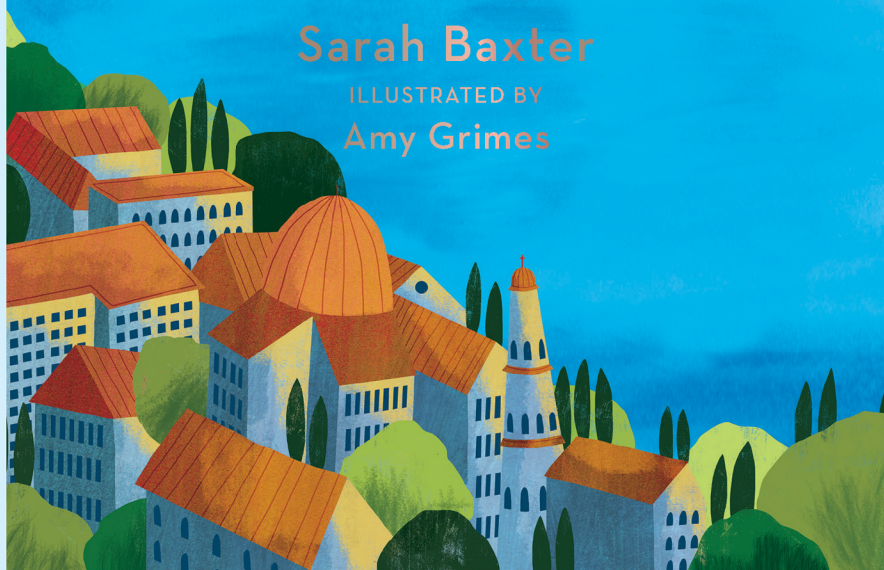


INSPIRED TRAVELLER'S GUIDE

LITERARY PLACES

Sarah Baxter

ILLUSTRATED BY
Amy Grimes



INSPIRED TRAVELLER'S GUIDE
LITERARY PLACES



INSPIRED
TRAVELLER'S GUIDE
LITERARY PLACES

SARAH BAXTER

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
AMY GRIMES



WHITE LION
PUBLISHING



Brimming with creative inspiration, how-to projects and useful information to enrich your everyday life, Quarto Knows is a favourite destination for those pursuing their interests and passions. Visit our site and dig deeper with our books into your area of interest: Quarto Creates, Quarto Cooks, Quarto Homes, Quarto Lives, Quarto Drives, Quarto Explores, Quarto Gifts, or Quarto Kids.

First published in 2019 by White Lion Publishing,
an imprint of The Quarto Group.

The Old Brewery, 6 Blundell Street,
London, N7 9BH,
United Kingdom
T (0)20 7700 6700
www.QuartoKnows.com

© 2019 Quarto Publishing plc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilised in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from White Lion Publishing.

Every effort has been made to trace the copyright holders of material quoted in this book. If application is made in writing to the publisher, any omissions will be included in future editions.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978 1 78131 810 2
Ebook ISBN 978 1 78131 811 9

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Design by Paileen Currie

Printed in China

CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	6
Paris, <i>Les Misérables</i>	10
Dublin, <i>Ulysses</i>	16
Florence, <i>A Room with a View</i>	20
Naples, <i>My Brilliant Friend</i>	26
Berlin, <i>Berlin Alexanderplatz</i>	30
Nordland, <i>Growth of the Soil</i>	36
St Petersburg, <i>Crime and Punishment</i>	42
Sierra de Guadarrama, <i>For Whom the Bell Tolls</i>	48
La Mancha, <i>Don Quixote</i>	54
Davos, <i>The Magic Mountain</i>	60
Bath, <i>Northanger Abbey & Persuasion</i>	66
London, <i>Oliver Twist</i>	72
Yorkshire Moors, <i>Wuthering Heights</i>	78
Cairo, <i>Palace Walk</i>	82
Soweto, <i>Burger's Daughter</i>	88
Kerala, <i>The God of Small Things</i>	92
Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City), <i>The Quiet American</i>	98
Kabul, <i>The Kite Runner</i>	102
Hanging Rock, <i>Picnic at Hanging Rock</i>	106
New York, <i>The Catcher in the Rye</i>	110
Monterey, <i>Cannery Row</i>	116
Mississippi River, <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i>	124
Monroeville, <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>	128
Cartagena, <i>Love in the Time of Cholera</i>	134
Chile, <i>The House of the Spirits</i>	140

INTRODUCTION

TURN OVER the page. What – or where – do you see? Perhaps you see city streets or verdant fields, vast mountain ranges or dark, haunted forests, stinking slums or golden temples. A multitude of worlds written into being. Palaces of words, landscapes of letters, towns built of sentences. Whole societies or galaxies constructed from carefully laid conjunctions, stocky nouns, playful verbs; from swirls and curlicues of ink.

Writers build places. Sometimes they conjure make-believe realms, unfettered by rules of sense or science. But sometimes they evoke real ones – destinations you can find on a map. And sometimes they manage to make those real places feel more real than any photo ever could. They render locations large in mere ink, perfectly capturing their sights, sounds, smells and essence, turning a previously blank sheet into a teleporter for the reader's imagination.

Truly great writers recreate not only locations but also eras and histories. Indeed, via some classic works of literature, a reader can travel both around the world and seemingly back in time: to the plains of medieval Spain, to the squalor of Victorian London, to the horror of apartheid-divided South Africa. The very best writers bring not only the physicality of these destinations to life but also their layers; their nooks and crannies, their politics and their position in the world. In this way, these destinations can come alive for people living in different countries, on different continents, even in different centuries. Not everyone is able to travel. And no one – not yet – can travel in time. So by reading great books anyone, of any nation, is able to 'journey' to a totally other period and place.

In this book we have focused on just 25 great literary places – a much-deliberated shortlist of intriguing locations that have featured, if not starred, in some of the best novels ever penned. With the help of beautiful illustrations, this armchair guide hopes to convey you to these varied spots, spread all over the globe. Many of them you may know, some you may not. But, with luck, every chapter will transport you, for a moment at least, to somewhere else entirely – be it the politically and seismically shaken Chilean countryside (page 140), the beer-sticky and insalubrious bars of 1900s Dublin (page 16) or the languid backwaters of southern India, where death and incest lurk behind every swaying palm (page 92).

In many cases the destinations collected here aren't just passive backdrops to the tragedies, romances and adventures that unfold within them. These destinations become characters in their own right, rising up from behind the scenes to take centre stage; they have agency, influencing plot, action, emotions and outcomes.

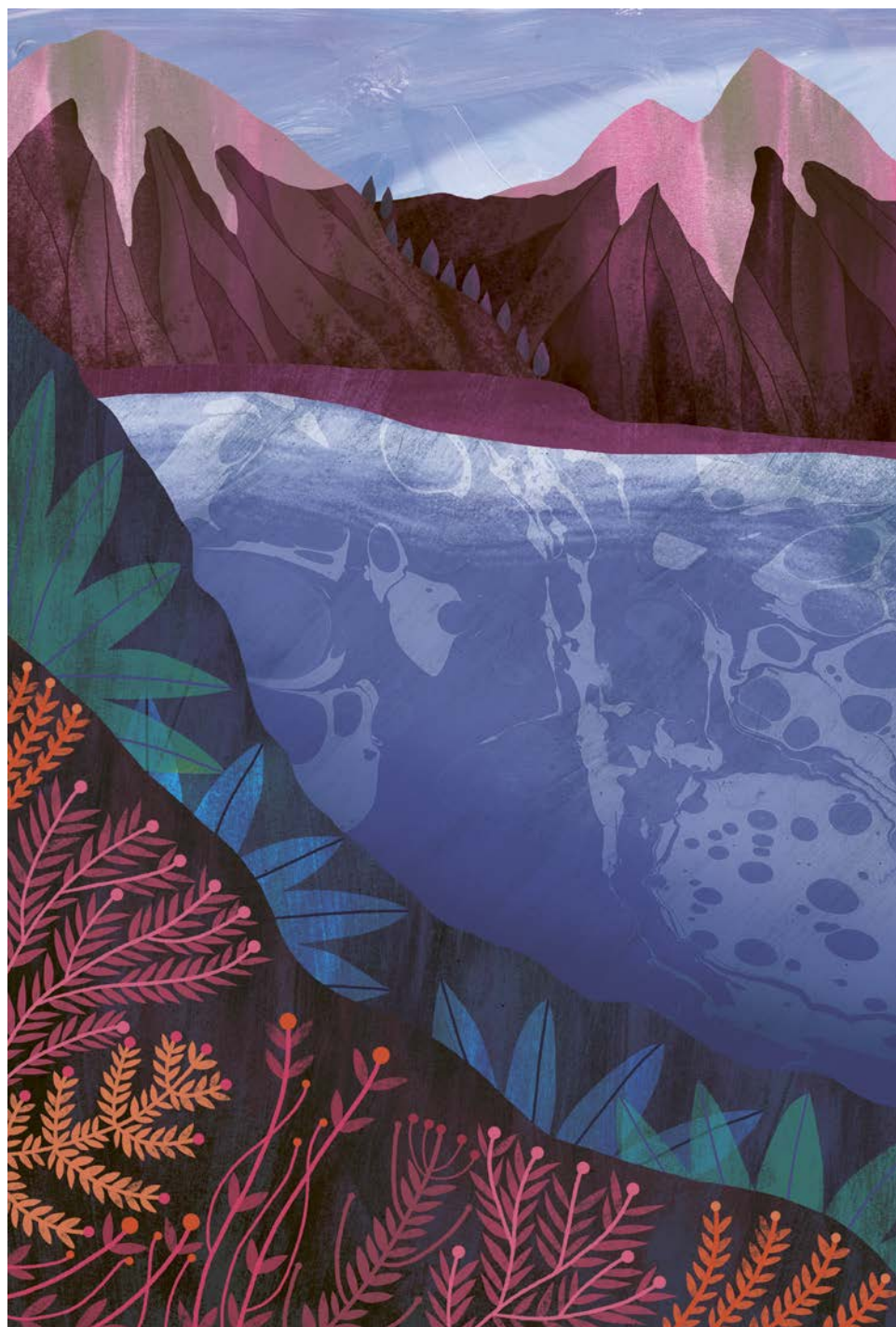
For instance, consider the North York Moors of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (page 78). This heather-fuzzed, wind-whipped wilderness, where the literary Brontë family lived, played and wrote, may as well be listed in the novel's dramatis personae. The moors feel as corporeal, untameable, moody and brooding as *Wuthering Heights'* antihero Heathcliff himself. It's utterly impossible to imagine this strange 19th-century Gothic romance – so fierce and full of passion – set anywhere else on the planet. The author and her masterpiece are both inseparable from this soil.

Likewise, Holden Caulfield's iconic episode of teenage angst, as portrayed in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (page 110), wouldn't have quite the impact if it wasn't set on the hustling, bustling, grim-and-glamorous avenues of late-1940s Manhattan. Salinger captures the mid-century metropolis, with its pimps and phonies and elusive ducks, at a defining moment – a time when New York was both dealing with the dark aftermath of the Second World War and booming on the world scene. The city's external chaos and confusion mirror the inner turmoil in the young protagonist's mind.

In some cases the words, the place, the culture and the events are so intertwined and richly rendered in a novel that reading it is akin to absorbing the best sort of history lesson, without even noticing. The Cairo Trilogy by Naguib Mahfouz (page 82) not only describes the specific geography of the Egyptian capital's most

atmospheric neighbourhood, it weaves in myriad strands – from cookery to religion, architecture to 20th-century politics – to create an elaborate carpet of a book. You can be enthralled by the narrative of the al-Jawad family, as you might be by any such saga, but you'll also come away better educated about Islam and about what has made Egypt the country it is today.

There are many, many more literary locations that could have been included here – places so brilliantly evoked in books that you can almost smell the dirt, dust or blood on their pages. For example, we could have taken a murderous cruise down the Nile with crime queen Agatha Christie; we might have explored Istanbul through the Nobel Prize-winning pages of local-born Orhan Pamuk; or we could have followed the sinister Dracula trail laid in Romania by Bram Stoker. Sadly, the pages of this modest book are limited to covering only 25 others. But maybe by reading a little about this handful of wonderful written worlds you might feel inspired to either read the original tomes or to continue your literary travels by seeking out more globe-trotting works. Who knows? You might even feel moved to travel to some of the real-life locations and try encapsulating them on paper yourself ...



Which? *Les Misérables* by
Victor Hugo (1862)

What? French City of Light,
squalor; revolution, *égalité*
and Enlightenment

PARIS

DO YOU hear the people sing? The angry men, demanding to be heard? Once, before these elegant boulevards ploughed through the congested slums, this city screamed with revolution; tight-packed, disease-festered alleys clogged with barricades and voices yearning for *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. Now, the avenues are wide, bright, brimming with bonhomie; the noise is of coffee cups chinking on enamel tabletops, breezes rattling the neat plane trees. These streets are elegance and *amour* incarnate. But once they flowed with blood ...

By the 1850s – when Victor Hugo was writing *Les Misérables* – Paris was quite literally the City of Light. Around 15,000 newly installed gaslights illuminated the French capital. Night-times became safer; citizens were drawn to the streets at all hours – a pavement culture that endures today. But just a few decades before, when *Les Misérables* is set, the city was a far darker place. Paris may have birthed the 18th-century's intellectual Enlightenment but, for the impoverished majority, it was still rife with inequality and despair. As Hugo once wrote, 'He who contemplates the depths of Paris is seized with vertigo. Nothing is more fantastic. Nothing is more tragic. Nothing is more sublime.'

Les Misérables contains all of those qualities. One of the longest novels ever written, it charts the travails of Jean Valjean, beginning in 1815, as he's paroled after nearly two decades in prison for stealing a loaf of bread, and finishing in the aftermath of the 1832 Paris Uprising, when Valjean finds redemption on his deathbed.







During this period, the city was still the 'old Paris' that Hugo loved, a labyrinth of narrow, intertwining streets, courtyards and crannies where characters could slip easily into the shadows. However, the city was also overcrowded, unhealthy and increasingly disillusioned: despite the world-upending 1789 Revolution, France seemed to be sinking back into aristocratic ways. Hence the Uprising. On 5 June 1832 around 3,000 Republican insurgents briefly controlled eastern and central Paris, an area spanning from the Châtelet to the Île de la Cité and Faubourg Saint-Antoine; barricades rose in the streets off rue Saint-Denis. But by 6 June the reinforced National Guard had stamped out the rebellion. Around 800 people were killed or wounded.

Hugo himself witnessed the riots. He was writing in the Tuileries Garden when he heard gunshots from the direction of Les Halles, the traditional market area with its warren of alleys (now replaced by a shopping mall). He followed the noise north, but was forced to shelter in passage du Saumon (now passage Ben-Aïad – closed to the public), while bullets whizzed past.

The city has changed immeasurably since. Between 1853 and 1870, urban planner Baron Haussmann razed much of the medieval city, replacing its ancient chaos with modern order: broad, straight boulevards, open intersections, public parks, harmonious terraces of mansard-roofed mansions. Avenues were made wide enough for carriages; they were also made too wide for effective barricades. The result was a city more homogenous, more hygienic, arguably more handsome but stripped of centuries of history.

Haussmann has certainly made it more difficult to follow in the footsteps of Valjean, his ward Cosette, her suitor Marius and the rest of Hugo's revolutionaries, vagabonds, gendarmes and whores. But echoes of his Paris remain. Most evocative is the Marais (the marsh), where there are more intact medieval buildings than anywhere else in the city. This neighbourhood on the Right Bank of the Seine survived Haussmannisation; it's still a maze of tight-knit cobbled lanes, easy to get lost in, and now jam-packed with bookshops, boutiques, bars and cafés. It's in the Marais that you'll find the Places des Vosges, a perfect, tree-lined square framed by arcaded 17th-century houses, one of which is Hugo's former home (now a museum). At the heart of the Marais is the baroque Jesuit church of Saint-Paul-Saint-Louis, where Marius and Cosette are

wed; it's also home to two shell-shaped fonts that Hugo donated to the church after his own daughter married there.

The area to the west, the Latin Quarter, is another remnant of medieval streets. The Sorbonne, France's first university, was founded here in 1257, establishing this area as a studenty haven of intellectual thought and no-frills bistros. This is where Marius and his fellow revolutionaries would have likely spent their days discussing a new tomorrow over cheap vin rouge.

Nearby is the Jardin du Luxembourg, Paris's second-largest park, and a leafy setting for love. Amid the Jardin's sparrow-tweeting chestnut trees, Marius and Cosette first catch each other's eye. You can still walk the gravel paths, among the centuries-old pear trees and the statues of poets and politicians. One sculpture, *Le Marchand de Masques* (1883), depicts a boy hawking masks of famous people; the mask in his raised hand is the face of Hugo.

However, the best way to sense the plight of Hugo's *misérables* is to descend into the sewers. For Hugo, they were 'another Paris under herself', a dank, foul-smelling facsimile with its own streets and alleyways. It's by descending to this abyss that Valjean rescues the wounded Marius – salvation via hell. Haussmann improved the sewage system but still, a visit to Musée des Égouts de Paris (the Paris Sewer Museum), following the raised walkways above the effluent, brings to mind – and nose – the Paris of Valjean.

Valjean dies at peace, and is buried beneath a blank slab in an untended corner of a Paris cemetery. On his deathbed in 1885, Hugo asked to be buried in a pauper's coffin, but was first processed up the Champs-Élysées and laid in state under the Arc de Triomphe, before being put in the crypt of the Panthéon, alongside Dumas and Zola. In death, raised to hero; on the page, striving with the common man.

Which? *Ulysses* by James Joyce
(1922)

What? The world in miniature,
for the humdrum events
of one epic Irish day

DUBLIN

THE PUB is warm and beery. Grog glasses – drained, foam stained – scatter sticky veneer. Red-wine lips, hoppy breath, a slurry of slurring; laughter like gunfire, craic-ing off the wood panels, mirror walls and ranks of whiskey bottles. Bar talk is of theology and adultery, literature and death, soap and sausages. Everything and nothing, discussed or daydreamed over a quick cheese sandwich. A nothing old day. But the stuff of life – infinitesimal yet essential – all the same ...

James Joyce's *Ulysses* – variously considered the most momentous, accomplished, infuriating and unreadable book in the English language – is the ordinary made extraordinary. It's a modernist reworking of Homer's *Odyssey*, but while the Ancient Greek poem tells of Odysseus's incident-packed return from the Trojan War, Joyce makes an epic out of a single, unremarkable day.

Ulysses follows Leopold Bloom, a Jewish ad canvasser for *The Freeman's Journal*, as he wanders around Dublin on 16 June 1904. He attends a funeral, goes to the pub, ducks into a museum (to avoid the man sleeping with his wife), pleasures himself by Sandymount Strand, enters the red-light district. The novel is a chaotic stream of consciousness, performing stylistic acrobatics to try to render the human experience. But it is grounded in the streets of Dublin. Joyce, writing from self-exile in Paris, slavishly researched the physicality of the city. Though he seldom returned, he remained tethered: 'When I die,' he once said, 'Dublin will be written in my heart.'

At the turn of the century the city was changing. The well-to-do had moved to the suburbs as the overcrowded centre decayed.



Dublin had some of Europe's worst slums; almost one in every four children died before their first birthday. A Celtic Revival was promoting Irish culture and language while in politics the Irish Parliamentary Party was pressing for Home Rule (rather than independence). But more radical movements were fermenting, and the Great War (1914–1918), Easter Rising (1916) and IRA violence were imminent. Though published in 1922, the 'action' of *Ulysses* predates this tumult. Joyce concerns himself, not with the struggles of nations but rather the little battles an Everyman faces, everyday. Dublin becomes a microcosm of the world.

Joyce's geographic diligence makes it possible to trace Bloom's footsteps. Start at No. 7 Eccles Street, Bloom's home, where he fries kidneys and contemplates his wife's infidelity. The building was knocked down in the 1960s but a plaque marks the spot and the original doorway is preserved within a fine townhouse on North Great George's Street, now the James Joyce Centre.

O'Connell Street lies around the corner, a fashionable address in Georgian times, though faded by the 1900s, and damaged during the Easter Rising. No more the horse-drawn cabs and clanking trams; a stroll down its leafy central mall these days is accompanied by car din and a mishmash of architectural styles. Bloom wouldn't have passed Joyce, who now leans nonchalantly in bronze at the corner with North Earl Street, but he did note the monument to Irish leader Daniel O'Connell – 'the hugecloaked Liberator's form' – which stares across the River Liffey.

Bloom buys Banbury cakes to feed the wheeling gulls as he walks over the wide span of O'Connell Bridge, the divide between dingier north Dublin and the more affluent south. This crossing takes you and Bloom into the heart of Dublin, home to the Bank of Ireland (originally the Irish Parliament building), prestigious Trinity College (where Catholic Joyce didn't go), the National Library (where he frequently did). It leads to narrow, shop-lined Grafton Street, still gay with awnings, where locals and outsiders alike still come for the craic – Dublin's social essence.

Bloom is hungry when he hits Duke Street. His first choice, The Burton – establishment of 'pungent meatjuice, slop of greens' – is no more. But Davy Byrnes pub, a traditional boozer, first opened in 1889, still serves Gorgonzola sandwiches and glasses of Burgundy (Bloom's lunch of choice), providing a tangible taste of Joyce's sometimes indigestible masterpiece.



Which? *A Room with a View* by
E.M. Forster (1908)

What? Resplendent Italian
Renaissance city where
stifled passions break free

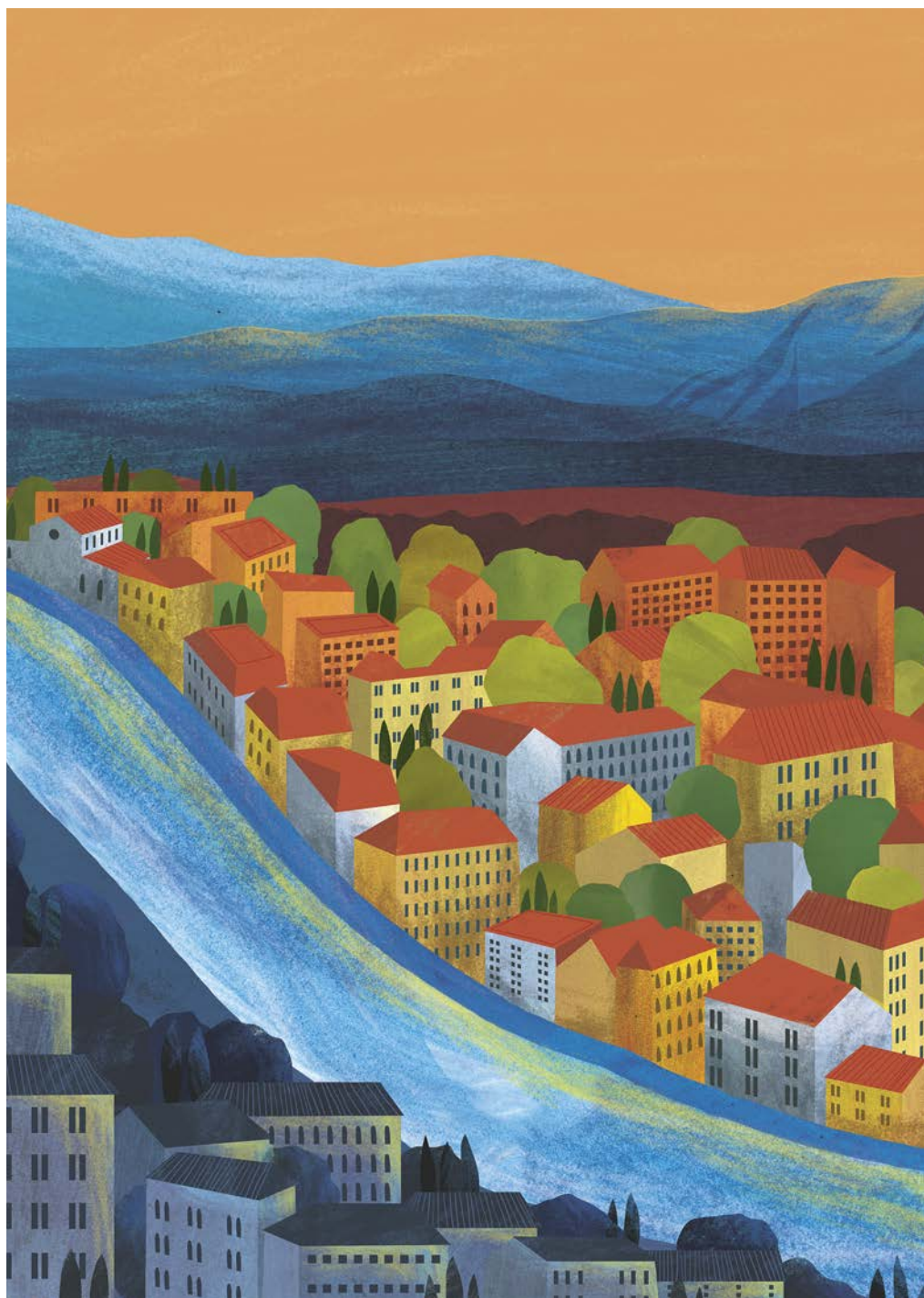
FLORENCE

FLING WIDE the casement windows and the essence of the city floods in. Fresh morning air carries church bells and wingbeats, barrows clattering on cobbles, the river murmuring below. Sunlight hits the room's red-tiled floor; dazzles the linen, nurtures the geraniums on the sill. Leaning out, the view unfurls: a Renaissance masterpiece of golden *palazzi* and terracotta rooftops, speared by towers and a huge, impossible dome. Behind that, green hills braid and fade into the distance. The romance is palpable. This is a 'magic city', the sort where one might do the most extraordinary things ...

Florence is irresistible. In its 15th-century golden age, when it birthed the Italian Renaissance, the Tuscan city was artistically unmatched. Briefly, from 1865 to 1871, it was even capital of a newly unified Italy. As leisure travel became increasingly possible, well-heeled tourists flocked to appreciate its sights. Tourists just like Lucy Honeychurch, heroine of *A Room with a View*.

E.M. Forster wrote this sun-drenched romantic comedy in early 20th-century England, a place of stifling conventions for the upper-middle classes. The novel pokes a critical finger at the sterility and rigidity of Edwardian England. But it offers an antidote: Florence. The Italian city is all that England is not. Instead of structure, it is spontaneity; rather than pallor, it is passion; rather than niceness, it is life. Today's Florence remains all of those things. The retreating Nazis destroyed the old bridges (except the famed Ponte Vecchio); the calamitous flood of 1966 ruined many buildings; the tourist throngs have become even more maddening. But this city – Unesco World Heritage-listed in its entirety – still has the power to enchant.







Naïve ingénue Lucy and her chaperone leave quiet Surrey for a very proper Italian trip, ticking off what the Baedeker guide prescribes. At the Pension Bertolini they are distraught at having rooms looking into a courtyard rather than over the Arno. Two Englishmen, who have river views, suggest a swap. And there begins Lucy's coming of age, a struggle between her old-fashioned upbringing and a fiery new independence. After only days she's witnessed a murder and had her first kiss. If England is vanilla, Florence is tutti frutti – all colours, all flavours.

You can't stay at the fictional Pension Bertolini, nor the hotel that inspired it. In 1901 Forster stayed at Pension Simi, on the Arno's north embankment, looking over the river to the cypresses of San Miniato and the Apennines' foothills. Pension Simi no longer exists. And anyway, the outlook immortalised in the 1985 film of *A Room with a View* is from the Arno's south bank, looking over the rooftops of the historic centre.

However, no matter where you stay, you can walk, as Lucy did. The frame of central Florence has changed little since the Renaissance. It's the same compact jigsaw of narrow alleys lined with elegant *palazzi*, grand churches and medieval chapels. There are world-class art museums – the Uffizi, the Bargello – hung to the rafters with Titians, Botticellis, Donatellos, Raphaels. Sculptures worthy of galleries can also be found scattered willy-nilly, lodging in loggia or guarding piazzas.

Just as Lucy does, you can turn right along the riverside Lungarno delle Grazie, past the Ponte alle Grazie bridge (the 1227 original now replaced by a post-war reconstruction) to take 'a dear dirty back way' to the church of Santa Croce. Lucy gets lost, drifting down streets, finding herself in the Piazza della Santissima Annunziata, admiring the cherub reliefs that decorate the Foundling Hospital: 'she had never seen anything more beautiful'.

Finally she arrives before Santa Croce, with its 'black-and-white facade of surpassing ugliness'. A matter of taste, perhaps. This striking neo-Gothic frontage is a 19th-century addition; the basilica was founded in the 13th century, and its vast, austere interior houses matchless frescoes by Giotto and other masters, as well as the tombs of Michelangelo and Machiavelli. There's much to admire, and much satisfaction to be gained from appreciating the artworks deemed the finest – a bourgeois trait that Forster lampoons. But

maybe, like Lucy, Santa Croce will leave you cold. Because arguably Florence is best not when studied but when felt.

Later, Lucy finds herself in the Piazza della Signoria, the city's main square and long the centre of political life. Dominated by the Palazzo Vecchio, it's a veritable outdoor museum; a replica of Michelangelo's *David* stands where the original did, before it was moved to the nearby Galleria dell'Accademia. It's in this piazza that Lucy witnesses a murder, faints onto George Emerson and sets her life on a new trajectory. Hopefully you won't witness bloodshed, though Cellini's statue of Perseus with the head of Medusa ensures a hint of the macabre.

You can also follow Forster's English folk – by bus rather than horse and carriage – to Fiesole, a tiny hill town just northeast of the centre of Florence. This is where Florentines come to seek green space, where the views of the Arno Valley are spectacular and where, given a chance, you should do as George and Lucy did and sneak a kiss in a field of violets.

Florence is culturally magnificent, from the priceless art at street level to the tip of the Duomo's cupola. But there's also the Florence of the senses, the city that comes alive when you feel its hot sun on your skin. When you loiter over lunch, take a slow *passaggiata* in the cooling afternoon, watch a pink-orange sunset, sip a glass of good Chianti. When you stop questing for information but think of 'nothing but the blue sky and the men and the women who live under it'.

Which? *My Brilliant Friend* by
Elena Ferrante (2011)

What? Southern Italian city of
dirt and danger for two
young girls coming of age

NAPLES

THE CLOSE-PACKED, dirty-white apartment blocks compress the stinking heat. It's a thick fug of frying *panzerotto*, ripening tomatoes, trash and urine, two-stroke engine oil, fish on the turn, neglect.

Residents of the windowless ground-floor flats stand on their doorsteps, peeling vegetables, smoking cigarettes and gossiping in an impenetrable, passive-aggressive, sing-song dialect that rattles along with the passing trains. In spit-'n'-sawdust bars, *disperazione* – the hopeless – drink to escape. But somewhere a bell rings and children run from the schoolyard with their friends and their book bags and, perhaps, their minds on a brighter future ...

A darkness enveloped 1950s Naples. And it wasn't just the ever-present threat of nearby Mount Vesuvius, which had blown rather dramatically in 1944. It was a street-level wretchedness; the ugly stains of poverty and socioeconomic squalor, plus a simmering violence that – like the volcano – could erupt at any time. The southern city had been poor before the Second World War but afterwards lay in tatters: Naples was bombed around 200 times, more than any other Italian city. The rich could buy their way out. But most Neapolitans had to scrape by in the grime left behind.

It's into this sphere of dirt and danger that Elena Ferrante throws Elena 'Lenù' Greco and Lila Cerullo, heroines of the author's four Neapolitan Novels. The first book, *My Brilliant Friend*, follows these two bright young girls as they come of age in the middle of the century, in a dingy city suburb where life prospects are bleak.

Just as pseudonymous Ferrante does not give her real name (the author's identity remains a mystery), nor does she name the



'neighbourhood' at the heart of her novels. But it's widely believed to be the Rione Luzzatti, a working-class area just east of the Centrale station and bordered by the Napoli Poggioreale prison. Still bossed by the *camorra* (Naples mafia), this *rione* has a reputation for grime and crime, and isn't for wandering into alone. But there's a Neapolitan authenticity to these scuffed alleyways of Fascist-era blocks, barred windows and graffiti smears. Indeed, Luzzatti feels little changed from the 1950s, offering the dedicated Ferrante pilgrim a glimpse back into Lenù and Lila's world.

The wide Via Taddeo da Sessa is most likely the novel's infamous *stradone*, the wall-like main road that demarcates the edge of the girls' existence. It can be followed all the way to the murky 'tunnel with three entrances' on Via Gianturco, down which Lenù and Lila make their first attempt at escape, hoping to walk to the coast: despite living in a port city, just a few miles from the sea, they have never seen it for themselves. Within the heart of Rione Luzzatti you can almost conjure the novel's characters: a baker – like Signor Spagnuolo – creating oozy cream puffs and crisp *sfogliatelle*; a modern Enzo selling fruit, not from a cart these days but from the bonnet of his car; a 'mad widow' type, like Melina Capuccio, shrieking over the street-strung laundry.

In counterpoint to this earthy grit is more affluent Naples, specifically the sea-facing Chiaia neighbourhood: shiny, manicured, populated by women who seem to 'breathe a different air'. On occasion Lenù and Lila dip into this rarified realm, which Ferrante maps with far more precision. It's possible to follow the pair – and the wealthy, elegant people – down pedestrianised Via Chiaia, past Via Filangieri's high-end tailors' shops to Piazza dei Martiri's patriotic monument and into the leafy park of Villa Comunale. Walking here was, says Lenù, 'like a border crossing; a dense crowd and a sort of humiliating difference'.

Ending on Via Caracciolo, ahead lies the sea – 'But what a sea!' – with Vesuvius brewing across the water; potentially a whole new world in the distance. And yet. Behind is all of seething, seedy, splendid, seductive Naples, with its power to pull people back.



Which? *Berlin Alexanderplatz* by
Alfred Döblin (1929)

What? Indefatigable German
capital with a dark and
dazzling past

BERLIN

LIFE SWARMS around the square. S-Bahn trains and electric trams disgorge an endless stream of people, hurried feet weaving around the wide, paved plaza, eyes scanning the department stores and advertising boards, mouths wrapped around *Ketwurst* hot dogs and multifarious conversations. Each person has their own trials and triumphs: bankers, builders, adulterers, crooks, cabaret stars – who knows? Each writing their own story in this great metropolis ...

For author Alfred Döblin, Berlin wasn't just a city – it was *the* city. He grew up in the German capital, worked as a doctor in one of its slum neighbourhoods and once called himself a 'Berliner with vague notions of other cities and regions'. He only moved away under duress – after the 1933 Reichstag fire, Berlin was a dangerous place for a left-leaning Jew. But before Döblin went into exile, before the country was in full thrall to the mania of Adolf Hitler, he wrote his masterpiece: *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.

The novel, published in 1929 during the years of the Weimar Republic, follows convicted murderer Franz Biberkopf as he's released from prison. Biberkopf is determined to go straight but can't quite free himself from the city's seedy underbelly. He falls in with a gang, commits robbery, loses an arm, finds solace with a prostitute, gets framed for her murder and slowly loses his mind. But while the book is Biberkopf's story, Döblin makes clear that his miserable antihero is just one of many souls surviving in this heaving city – at the time, the third-largest in the world. *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is an evocation of Berlin itself, capturing it at one of its headiest and darkest moments.







Via an expressionist collage of newspaper reports, biblical stories, drinking songs and urban slang, Döblin brings the city to life, from the sewers up, recording its cacophony, machinery, meteorology, mundanity, enormity. By the turn of the last page, Berlin has been heard, breathed, imbibed.

The novel's backdrop is rife with violence, struggle and sin. The action plays out in the turbulent late 1920s, when Germany was clawing itself out of the First World War doldrums; a period of economic hardship and political unrest but also unprecedented cultural vitality, creativity and liberalism, as people sought respite from the recent horrors. *Berlin Alexanderplatz* snapshots this complex moment, when architecture, art and literature thrived, the nouveau riche were leading decadent lives but the proletariat were starving – in 1928, around 133,000 Berliners were unemployed. There's a sense of foreboding too. Hitler made his first public speech in Berlin in 1928, the year before the novel's publication; the rise of Nazism is imminent.

The working-class Alexanderplatz district is the ideal setting for Döblin's urban portrait. 'Alex' lies in Mitte, the heart of Berlin, both geographically and culturally. A transport hub since the Middle Ages, in the 19th century the district's main square was used as a cattle market and parade ground, but by the 1920s it was one of the city's raciest spots, a hotbed of nightclubs, burlesque shows, prostitutes, cocaine dealers, high hemlines and homosexuality.

Today, Alex is transformed. Alexanderplatz itself was largely flattened by Allied bombs during the Second World War but was rebuilt in the 1960s, when it was the centre of East Berlin. At this time, the square was pedestrianised and flanked with the dull, concrete *Plattenbau*-style architecture favoured by the DDR. Also, more notable landmarks were erected: the huge Centrum department store (now the Galeria Kaufhof mall); the *Weltzeituhr* (world clock), which shows the time in 148 cities; and the copper bowls of the *Brunnen der Völkerfreundschaft* (Fountain of International Friendship). Lording over everything is the 368 metre (1,207 foot-) high *Fernsehturm* (TV tower), completed in 1969 to provide a strident symbol of Communist power. It's still Germany's tallest building. Lifts – or 986 steps – lead up to the tower's sphere, where a visitor platform and rotating restaurant offer sweeping views. Quite the eyrie from which to look down on Döblin's much-changed but indomitable city.



Which? *Growth of the Soil* by
Knut Hamsun (1917)

What? Spectacular Norwegian
wilderness where quiet
heroes might prevail

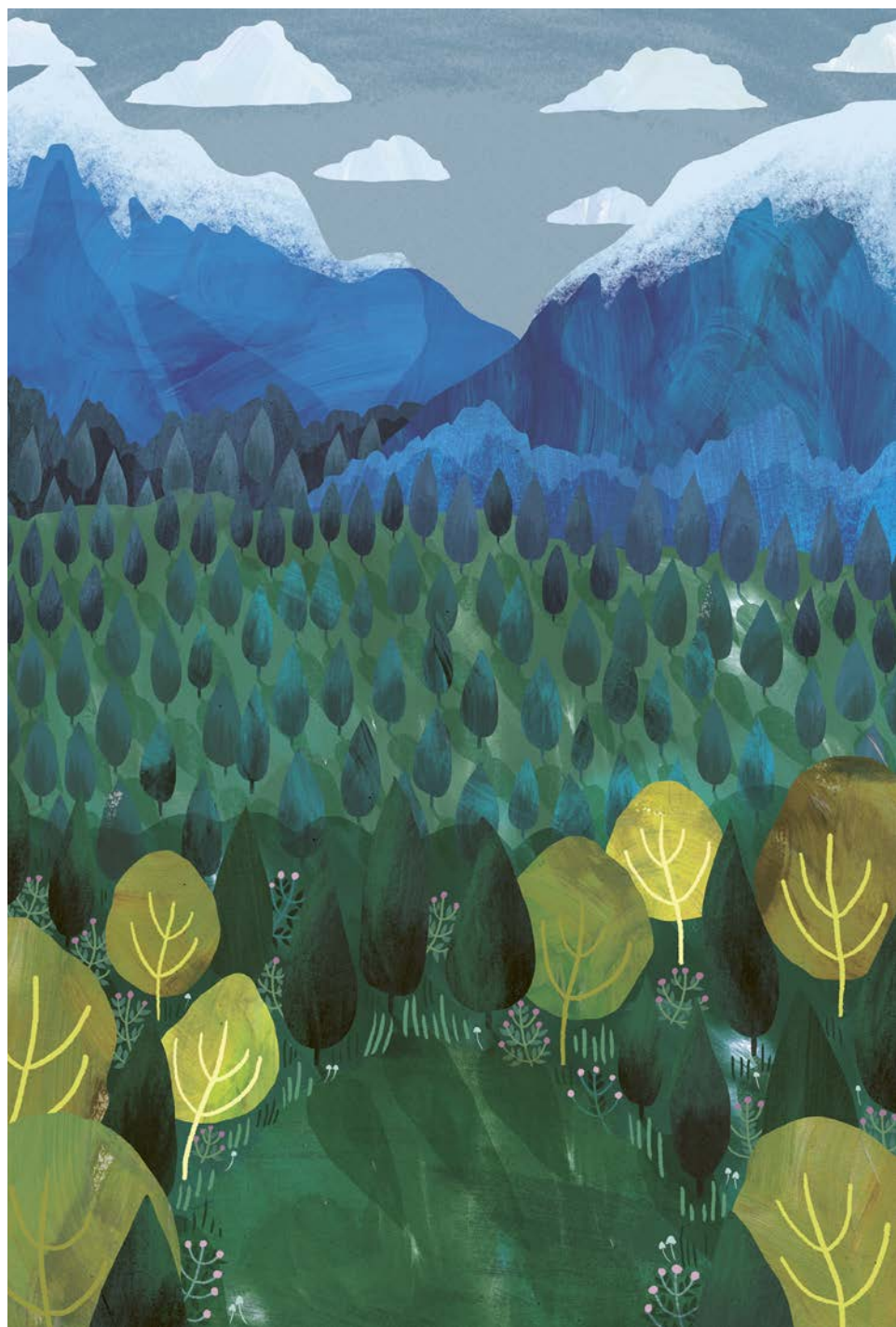
NORDLAND

A SIP of water from a purling stream. A handful of bilberries. A lichen-crusting log on which to briefly rest. The land provides. Steadily, invisibly, the ripe soil below nurtures the spruce and pine, the tiny ferns and cow mushrooms, the paint-splatter of wildflowers. A hare bounds across the grass, a grouse sputters from the heathers, the forest gently sighs, but otherwise all is quiet. This place is now. But it could be then. Or – with hope, with care – tomorrow. A timeless place of simplicity and awe ...

The county of Nordland encompasses more than a third of Norway, but only around 5 per cent of its people. Even today, this feels like pioneer country. A landscape of coastal mountains, narrow fjords and pine, birch and aspen; a region of Sami people, old superstitions, northern lights and midnight sun. The world in which Knut Hamsun was shaped.

Hamsun was born in 1859 to peasant farmers in central Norway. But his childhood was spent in Hamarøy, north of the Arctic Circle, where he worked on his uncle's farm. He didn't go to school until he was nine years old. The land was his early education. And the land is the lead character in his masterpiece, *Markens Grøde* – *Growth of the Soil*.

This 1917 novel follows the quietly courageous endeavours of Isak, a strong, monosyllabic farmer-settler, and his wife Inger, a woman with a harelip and 'good, heavy hands'. To begin, Isak sets out alone, seeking 'a place, a patch of ground'. On his chosen plot he chops, hoes and sows, building a home with nought but sweat and brawn – an understated hero. With the passing of the seasons,







he meets Inger, has children, lives a life of 'little happenings and big, all in their turn'. There are some black moments – not least infanticide – but there is also an evocation of rural life in all its uncomplicated beauty.

Growth of the Soil was a hit. In 1920, Hamsun was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, chiefly for this saga of strife and struggle. It encapsulated the life of pioneering Norwegian homesteaders at the beginning of the 20th century. Norway only gained full independence in 1905; Hamsun's tale of a man claiming his place was nation-building fiction from an author with a love of agrarian society, homeland and blood-and-soil nature.

These beliefs had a darker consequence. They chimed closely with the ethos of Nazi Germany, and Hamsun became an outspoken supporter of Adolf Hitler and National Union Party leader Vidkun Quisling, who collaborated with the Nazis after they occupied Norway in 1940. Hamsun even gifted his Nobel medal to Joseph Goebbels. This has muddied the author's legacy. Some scholars laud him as the best of a generation, even the 'father of modern literature', but, no matter how great the work, many cannot forgive his wartime stance.

Because of this, it wasn't until 2009 – on the 150th anniversary of his birth – that one of Norway's greatest novelists was commemorated in a significant way. The striking Knut Hamsun Centre, which draws architectural inspiration from the region's stave churches, sod roofs and rugged mountains, sits in the village of Presteid in Hamarøy, on the banks of the Glimma River. It's not without controversy. But it offers an exploration of both the writer's words and world views. And the view from the tower, over the countryside that inspired the writer, is undeniably splendid.

Also, there's nothing controversial about the soul of Norway's Nordland – the land itself, the soil of Isak and Inger. Exploring its hills, fjords and forests lies outside politics. Indeed, it's pleasingly democratic: the Norwegian law of *Allemannsrett* (Everyman's right) grants any individual permission to hike, camp and forage on another's land, as long as they do so respectfully. So you can head into the wilderness and claim, for one night at least, a land of your own.



Which? *Crime and Punishment* by
Fyodor Dostoyevsky
(1866)

What? Imperial Russian city
that can mess with a
man's soul

ST PETERSBURG

THE CITY in July: humid, suffocating, penetratingly bright. The sun barely sets during these summer 'white nights'; it glitters almost 24/7 on the canals, the baroque domes, the Neoclassical palaces and the

Soviet tower blocks. It seems to swing like a spotlight, exposing everything. Or maybe that scrutiny is all in the mind – a hot-bothered brain, addled by issues of penury, morality, faith and murder ...

Founded by Peter the Great in the early 18th century, St Petersburg was planned to be Russia's 'window on the West'. This modern capital, built on swampland by indentured labourers, grew quickly; by the 1860s it was overcrowded, and rife with poverty, crime and disease. This is the city of Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Like Dickens' London, Dostoyevsky's St Petersburg is desperate: there are, he writes, 'few more grim, harsh and strange influences on a man's soul than in Petersburg'.

Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, the world's first psychological thriller, follows impoverished ex-student Rodion Raskolnikov who, in desperate need of money, devises a plan to rob and kill an unscrupulous old pawnbroker. Mental torment ensues. It's a tale rooted in time and place. Not only does it exude the stink and suffocation of St Petersburg's streets in July, circa 1866, it delves into the great philosophical debate dividing society at the time: should Russia embrace its place in Europe or return to its folk traditions? Dostoyevsky – conservative, religious, Slavophile – was of the latter school of thinking, and viewed rising Western ideas of nihilism, rational egoism and secularism as dangerous to the country's future.







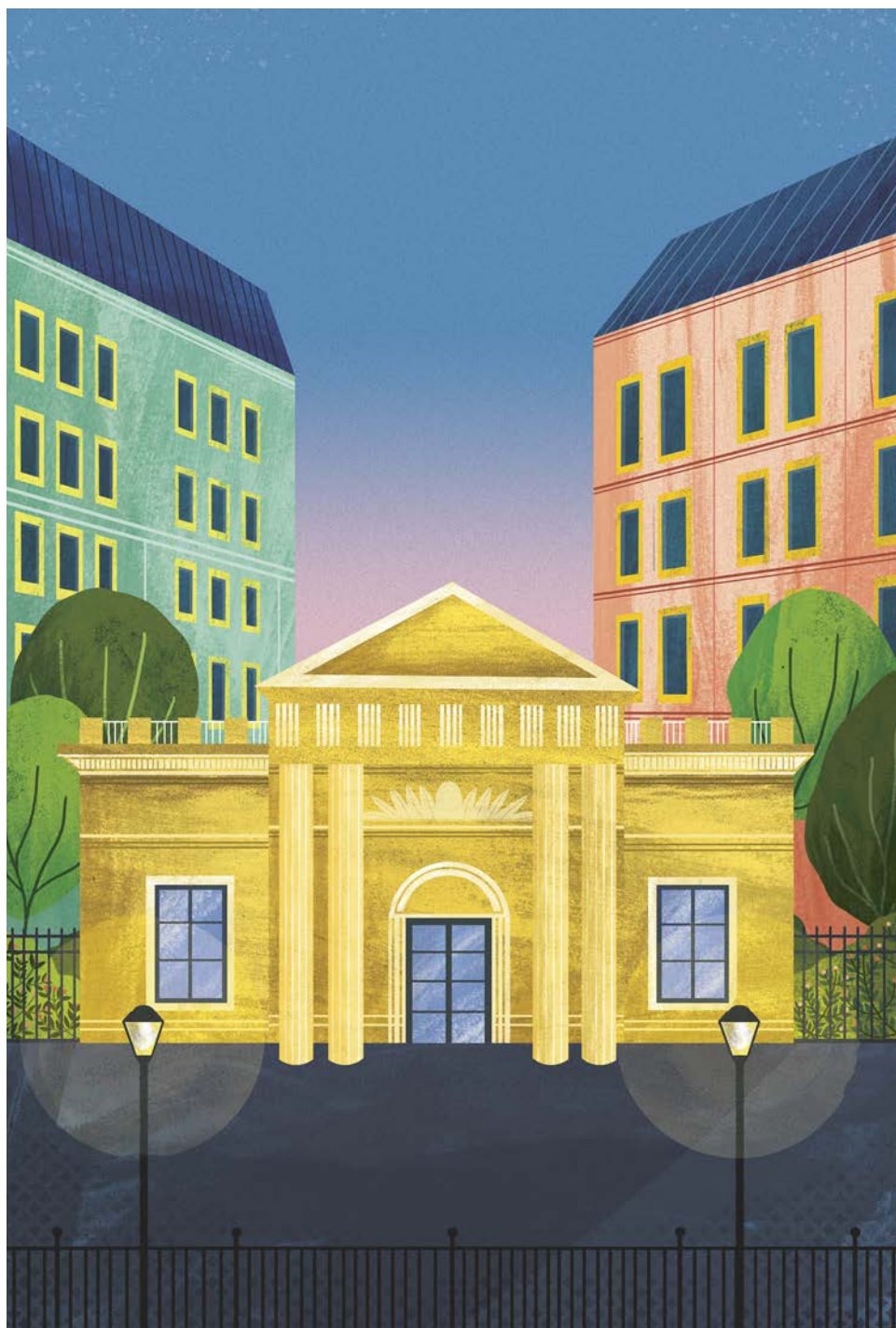
These are the ideas plaguing Raskolnikov, whose inner turmoil is mirrored in his external world. The novel shuns St Petersburg's magnificence and instead roams its squalid back rooms, brothels and spit-sticky inns. The action is centred on Sennaya Ploshchad, the Haymarket district. In the 19th century it was a notorious slum area, cramped and chaotic. It's been razed and cleaned up now, though one of the original buildings around the old market remains, the yellow Guardhouse – where Dostoyevsky himself spent two days imprisoned for a censorship violation in 1874.

Raskolnikov measures the footsteps – all 730 of them – between his rented attic and the home of the pawnbroker, and it's possible to walk to the scene of the crime, just as he did. The antihero lived on the corner of Stolyarny and Grazhdansky streets; a plaque now marks the building, its words roughly translating as: 'The tragic fates of the people of this area served as the basis of Dostoyevsky's passionate sermon on good for all humankind.'

When finally fixed on robbing and killing the pawnbroker, Raskolnikov procures an axe and takes a roundabout route, heading slowly south along Stolyarny, which was then an alley of 'unbearable stench', heaving with dingy taverns and drunks. Dostoyevsky himself lived here, at the corner of Kaznacheisky Street, while writing *Crime and Punishment*.

Raskolnikov follows Stolyarny to Kokushkin Bridge – then wooden, now metal-railed – which spans the Griboedov Canal. Pre-revolution, this waterway through the heart of St Petersburg was officially known as Ekaterininsky, after Empress Catherine the Great. However, those who lived within sniffing distance called it *kanava* (ditch) – back then it was an open cesspit. These days it's one of the city's finest thoroughfares, cleaned up and flanked by resplendent buildings.

From the bridge, Raskolnikov walks via Yusupov Gardens, where he dreams of installing fountains to 'refresh the air'; now it's a public park where you can laze by the lake. After 20 minutes, he arrives at the pawnbroker's apartment. It's thought to be 104 Griboedov Canal, an apartment block with exits onto both the canal and a side street – perfect for an escaping felon. You can't see inside – it's a private home. For a more intimate encounter with Dostoyevsky, pay a visit to 5/2 Kuznechny Alley, the house where he died, and which is now a museum. Or head out to Alexander Nevsky Monastery to pay your respects at Dostoyevsky's tomb.



Which? *For Whom the Bell Tolls* by
Ernest Hemingway
(1940)

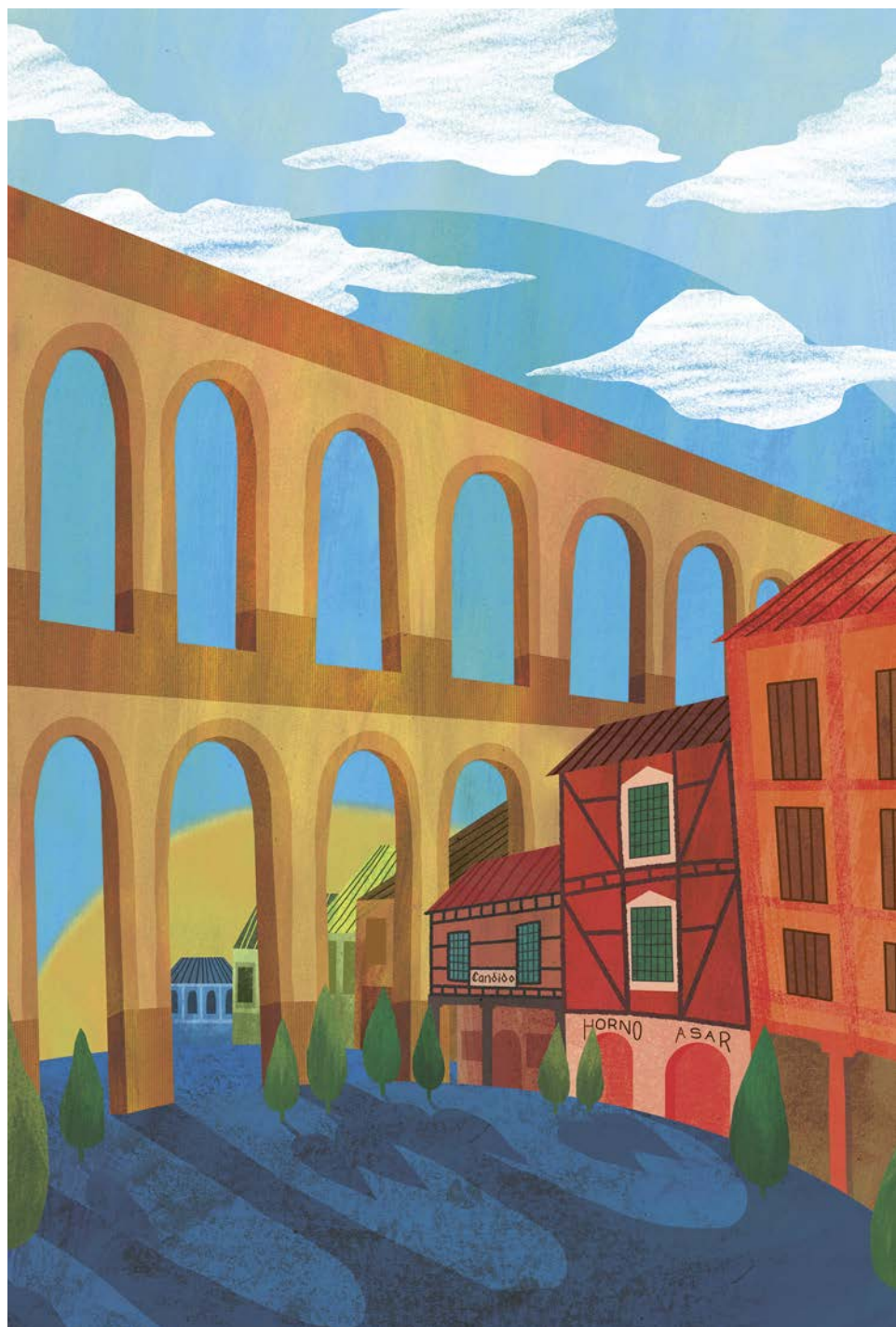
What? Magnificent Spanish
mountain range that
became a theatre of war

SIERRA DE GUADARRAMA

IT'S LATE afternoon and the sun is setting over the mountains, sliding off the slopes of Spanish gorse, juniper and pine; sinking down the gorge, into the stream, behind the lonesome bridge. The air – cool up here – grows cooler still as the day draws to a close. The forest is quiet, serene. Hard to imagine the thousands of bodies subsumed by this soil – though, scuff around, and there are bullet casings still scattered amid the rocks, dirt and fallen needles. This place of peace, once a battleground ...

The Sierra de Guadarrama rises from the parched *meseta*, just north of Madrid. Scorching in summer; snow-bitter in winter; these hefty mountains now provide a fresh-aired playground for Madrileños, but once rang with gunfire and ran with blood. During the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), when pro-democracy Republicans fought – and were ultimately defeated by – General Franco's right-wing Nationalists, the *sierra* saw some of the fiercest skirmishes. These peaks were a savage border area between Nationalist and Republican lines; guerrillas hid, plotted, ambushed and massacred within the granite folds.

Ernest Hemingway knew both the conflict and the mountains well. He spent time in Madrid during the war, working as a reporter for the North American Newspaper Alliance. He would file copy as Nationalist shells rained down on the city, and he would head off into the *sierra* on foot or horse. These forays, and his first-hand experience of war-torn Spain, furnished his novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, the story of American language professor Robert Jordan who ends up fighting for the Republicans amid the mountains. Like







Hemingway, Jordan is a man in love with Spain – with its fiery passions, its bullfighting and machismo, its vitality and intensity. 'That I am a foreigner is not my fault,' says Jordan, 'I would rather have been born here'.

The novel takes place over four nights in late May 1937. Its backdrop of chaos is real enough: as well as Republicans fighting Nationalists, there was divisive infighting between anarchist and communist factions on one side, and Francoists and Falangists on the other. The novel also references real offensives – at Valladolid, Segovia, El Escorial – placing it in the build-up to the Republican attempt to relieve the long siege of Madrid. But the exact events of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* – the blowing up of a particular metal bridge – are fictional.

Some posit that Hemingway based his bridge on the stone span across the *Rio de las Lombrices* (River of Worms), north of the Navacerrada Pass. There's no evidence this bridge was ever bombed. But take a walk in the beautiful, pine-cloaked mountains nearby and there's plenty of evidence of war. Bunkers, trenches and emplacements dot the slopes. However, there are no caves: though Hemingway's rag-tag Republicans are said to live in caves, the hard granite of the *sierra* actually provides no such hidey-holes.

In the novel, Jordan is told that the larger goal of his attack is for the Republicans to take Segovia, the historic city across the *sierra* from Madrid. The historical Segovia Offensive occurred between 31 May and 6 June 1937 – a defeat for the Republicans. Fortunately the fairytale-like city, with its soaring Roman aqueduct and Disney-inspiring Alcázar palace, remains intact, as does the Méson de Cándido restaurant where Hemingway once tucked into his favourite, *cochinillo asado* (roast suckling pig).

Also intact is the foothills town of San Lorenzo de El Escorial, where in the 16th century King Philip II ordered the construction of a vast monastery-palace, burial site of almost every Spanish monarch since Philip's father. After winning the war, Franco chose a nearby spot for his own contribution to heritage and remembrance. Marked by an enormous granite cross, the *Valle de los Caídos* (Valley of the Fallen) is a big, Brutalist, highly controversial and slightly sinister monument to those who died during the Civil War, as well as housing the tomb of Franco himself.



Which? *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes (1615)

What? Windswept Spanish plains of windmills, wheatfields and literary giants

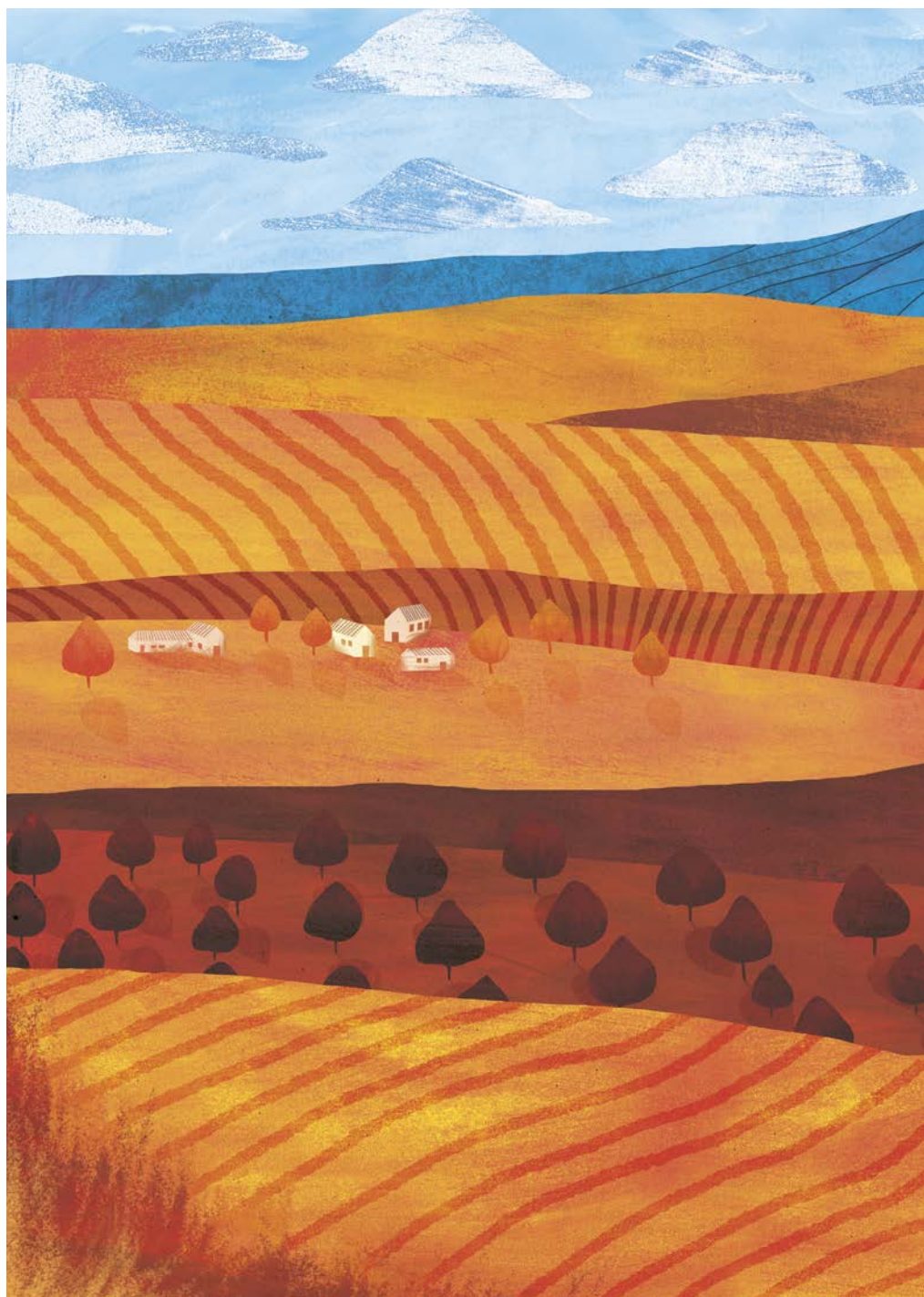
LA MANCHA

THE SUN slips earthwards, its last rays caressing the endless plateau of nodding wheat, saffron blooms and ancient olive groves. The light glows, too, on a phalanx of hulking white giants, lording the hillside and waving their long arms as if urging a fight. Yet these mighty monsters, so pugnacious from a distance, prove harmless up close. Not ogres but windmills, transformed by the day's late haze and the flights of a fanciful mind ...

The late Middle Ages heralded Spain's *Siglo de Oro* – Golden Age. From around 1492, following the end of the Reconquest, to the middle of the 17th century, the arts, architecture and exploration flourished on the Iberian peninsula. Columbus set off for the New World, Velázquez and El Greco dazzled with their paintbrushes, the royal monastery at El Escorial was built. And writer Miguel de Cervantes penned *Don Quixote* – not only the best-ever Spanish novel, but arguably the best novel of all time.

Cervantes' hefty tale follows Alonso Quixano, a middle-aged *hidalgo* (nobleman) and reader of medieval romances who titles himself Don Quixote, pulls on a suit of armour and sets out – with his squat squire Sancho Panza – like a Renaissance, horse-riding Batman to right wrongs and resurrect chivalry. But his escapades seldom go to plan; the 'Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance' frequently gets painfully trampled or beaten. In his magnum opus, Cervantes spoofs the genre Alonso so loves, and introduces the world of literature – hitherto fixated on myths and monsters – to universal truths and a fat dose of reality.







Don Quixote's domain is La Mancha, the wild, fertile plateau south of Madrid, and Spain's least densely populated region. Like the novel, the landscape here is epic: big deep-blue skies stretching over a near-infinite roll of red earth, flaxen crops and vine stripes, the occasional whitewashed windmill, the odd ruined castle, a scatter of country inns. It's a place where grand adventures might be had, or where the scale and the heat and the teasing horizon – always seeming just out of reach – might simply drive you mad.

Cervantes names few specific places; also, his settings can be slippery, transformed in Quixote's florid imagination, which turns inns into castles and farm girls into princesses. But it's still possible to trace a quixotic route across La Mancha – not least thanks to professors at a Madrid university, who spent years deciphering clues and postulating donkey speeds in order to pinpoint Don Quixote's home, 'somewhere in La Mancha, in a place whose name I do not care to remember'. The scholars settled on the town of Villanueva de los Infantes, stranded on the tableland 225 kilometres (140 miles) south of Madrid. Regardless of whether the Cervantes connection is valid, it's a charming little town, with many 16th- and 17th-century churches and palaces, and statues of Quixote, Panza and their steeds wandering across the handsome Plaza Mayor.

The foothills village of Puerto Lápice is explicitly mentioned in the novel. Here, Quixote persuades an innkeeper to knight him; today, a reconstructed inn gives flavour if not authenticity. Also named in the book is El Toboso, home of Dulcinea, the 'superhuman beauty' with whom Quixote is infatuated. The traditional 16th-century farmhouse once belonging to the woman who inspired Dulcinea is now a museum, complete with old iron and copper kitchenware, horse tack and a wine cellar and olive press. It's a place more befitting the peasant girl Dulcinea really is rather than the highborn lady that delusional Quixote believes her to be.

However, perhaps the most Quixote moment is to be found by driving across La Mancha's mind-messing emptiness towards Campo de Criptana. The town looms like a ghost, its whitewashed old Moorish centre seeping over a slope below a handful of hilltop 'giants' – site of Quixote's 'fearful and never imagined adventure of the windmills'. In Cervantes' time, around 30 or 40 windmills were clustered here; now 13 remain, waving their sails at the featureless plain, still stirring visions of Spain's great, flawed hero.



Which? *The Magic Mountain* by
Thomas Mann (1924)

What? Timeless Swiss alpine idyll
almost removed from the
real world

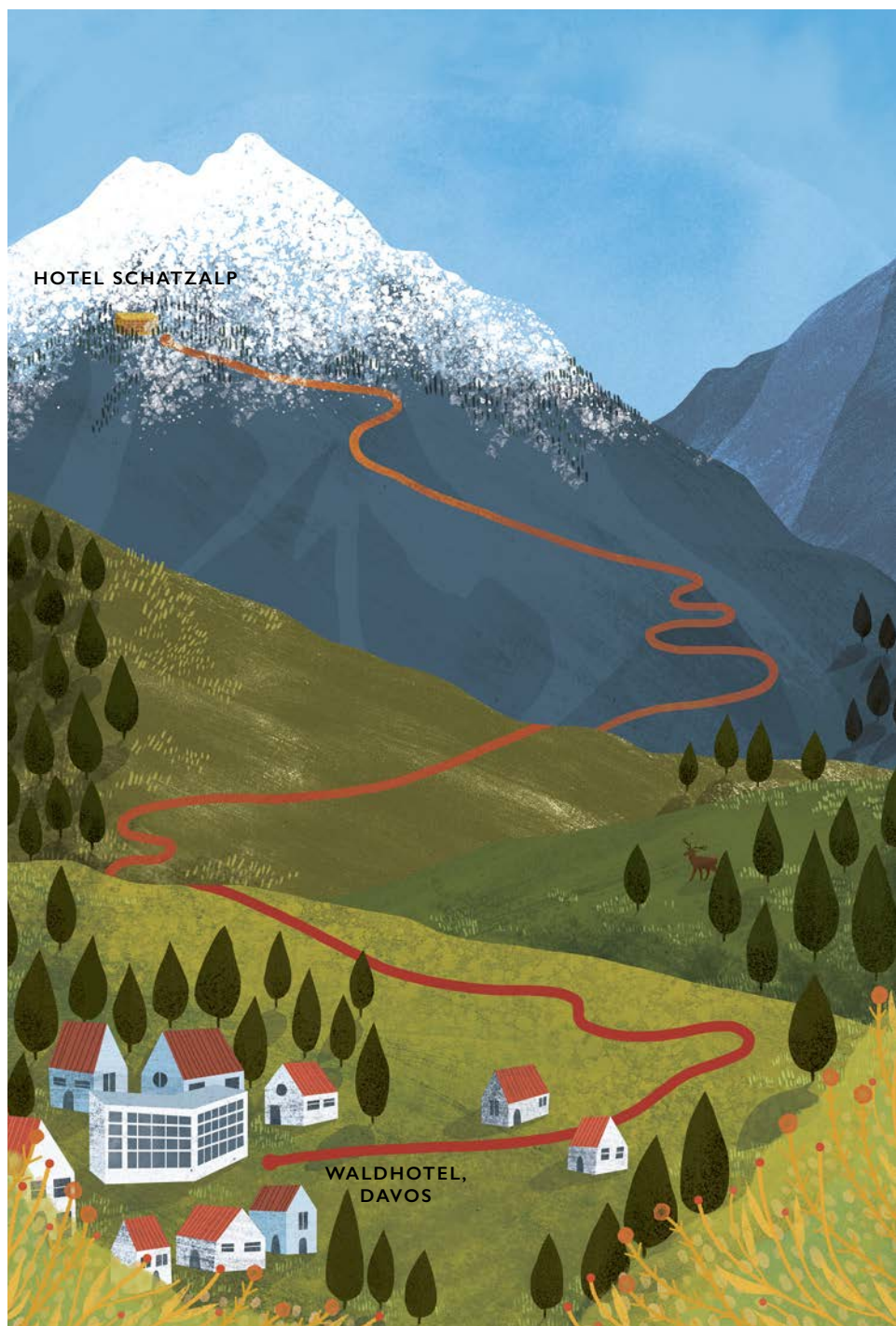
DAVOS

THE VIEW from the hotel terrace is like a tonic; like sinking into a beautiful ice bath, thrillingly, rejuvenatingly fresh. Snow blankets everything; the rocks, hollows, tree boughs and high peaks have been cloaked, plumped and softened. Everything sparkles too, winter sun scattering diamonds across the powdery slopes. Up in the magical mountains, the real world seems far, far away. Who wouldn't feel better after spending a week, or even years, here ...?

The Magic Mountain by Thomas Mann is the tale of young and naïve Hans Castorp who goes to visit a tubercular cousin at a Swiss sanatorium – and doesn't leave. Instead, Castorp sinks rather happily into the insularity and decadence of sanatorium life. And while doctors try to improve his physical health, conversations with fellow patients end up expanding his mind.

A bit like Thomas Mann. An ardent patriot during the First World War, the German author revised his outlook in the conflict's dark aftermath. By 1924, when *The Magic Mountain* was published, he was leaning leftwards towards democracy and liberalism. But this is not the sole ideology of the novel: it doesn't propose any one answer; it makes clear that there are many contradictory ways to understand the world.

The Magic Mountain is also a meditation on the nature of time, which passes differently in the rarified air and seclusion of Davos's Berghof sanatorium. Here, shielded from external cares, the hours, days, months, years are a ceaselessness of extravagant meals, proscribed rest, woodland walks, intellectual discussion. To the latter end, an international cast – Russian, Italian, Asian, Polish; the planet







in microcosm – is assembled in safe, neutral Switzerland to debate culture and philosophy. But as the patients in the sanatorium seek a cure, Europe beyond is sick. The novel begins in the first decade of the 20th century, the continent on the brink of war. When Castorp eventually leaves his alpine bubble seven years later, it's for the trenches. The final pages leave him limping across the mud, bombs falling, alive but with 'prospects poor'.

The hellish trenches are certainly a far cry from Mann's bewitched Swiss valley setting, where 'the towering statues of snow-clad Alps' can awaken 'feelings of the sublime and holy'. The high mountain town of Davos, in the canton of Graubünden, is now best known for hosting the annual World Economic Forum. But, from the mid-19th century, it was a popular spot for the sick. Many doctors believed the town's alpine air and microclimate were ideal for combatting illnesses, in particular tuberculosis. Some two dozen sanatoriums opened here, and patients spent hours sitting on terraces, wrapped in blankets, soaking up the sunshine; they'd take constitucionals, drink creamy milk and wine and breathe in deep lungfuls of the crisp, clear air.

Though not a precise version of Thomas Mann's fictional Berghof, the Schatzalp is a good approximation. Floating high on the mountainside above Davos, it opened as a luxury clinic in 1900. The funicular train, which conveyed patients up in minutes, is still the only way to get there, other than on foot. Being higher up the valley, the Schatzalp receives more sunshine than the town below, and the sanatorium was built facing south to optimise exposure to natural light. Its long, wind-sheltered verandas allowed patients to recline on deckchairs in the sun, enjoying the very best views.

The Schatzalp was converted into a hotel in the 1950s, when innovations such as penicillin killed the sanatorium industry. It has retained much belle époque charm, from its stained glass and painted peacocks to the hundred-year-old plumbing. There are also nods to its medicinal history – the lightbox panels above the bar reveal that this used to be the X-ray room.

A Thomas Mann Way walking path, dotted with quotations from *The Magic Mountain*, now connects the Schatzalp to Davos, via the Waldhotel – formerly the Woodland Sanatorium. This is where Katia Mann was recuperating from a lung complaint when her husband, Thomas, came to visit in spring 1912 and decided that this could be the setting for a good story ...



Which? *Northanger Abbey* &
Persuasion by Jane Austen
(1818)

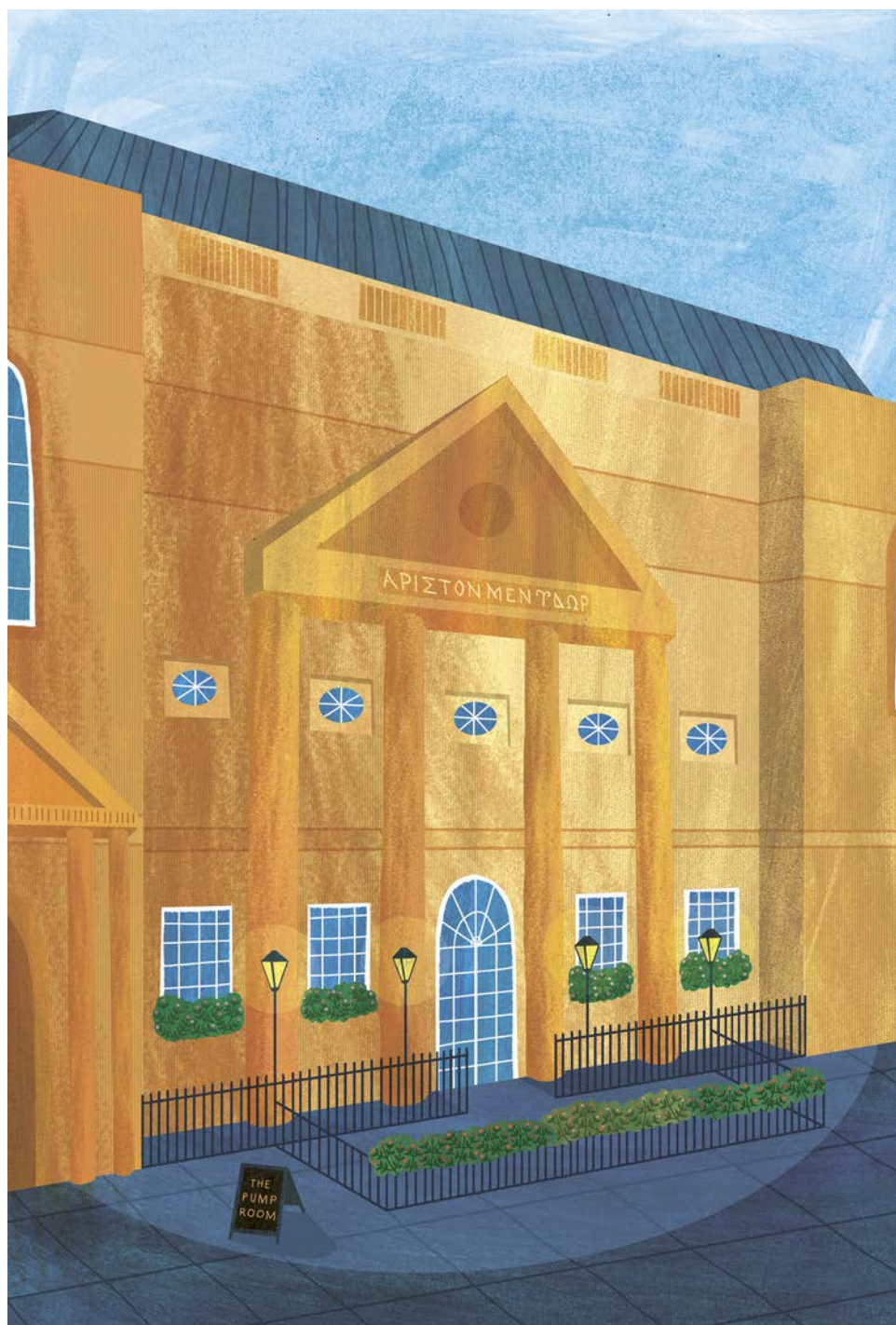
What? Splendid English city,
setting for a send-up of
Georgian high society

BATH

THE CRESCENT'S honeyed stone glows in the afternoon sunlight, a radiant architectural swoosh between the neat green lawn and cloudless blue sky. A long procession of Ionic columns and sash windows sweeps away in perfect symmetry, while the footsteps of the slowly strolling curious – faces up-turned, mouths agape – slap on worn-smooth slabs. Such splendour! But look behind the flawless facade and this elegant terrace tells a different story. Round the other side it's an untidy irregularity of annexes and add-ons. A Queen Anne front, a Mary-Anne back. A public face concealing darker truths ...

'Oh! Who can ever be tired of Bath?' Who indeed. In *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen's playful satire on the Gothic novel, heroine Catherine Morland speaks of the allure of the Somerset city in the early 19th century – an allure that continues to this day. In England, there is nowhere else quite like it; nowhere as perfectly, homogeneously preserved. To walk along its sweeping crescents and golden streets now is almost to step straight back into Austen's pages, minus the bonnets and breeches.

Bath nestles within a loop of the River Avon, on the southern edge of the rolling-green Cotswold Hills. The city owes its situation and success to its hot springs, unique in Britain, and first developed by the Romans who built an elaborate bathing complex here, which they called *Aquae Sulis*. Though the Roman temple fell into disuse, and was eventually forgotten – until its rediscovery in 1775 – these healing waters continued to be sought after. From the 17th century, following a succession of royal visits, Bath became the *resort du jour*,







with society's finest coming here for 'the season' to bathe, drink, see, be seen, gossip and matchmake. Befitting its status, the city was given a stylish Georgian facelift, with father-and-son architects John Wood the Elder (1704–1754) and Younger (1728–1782) remodelling the city, using the local golden limestone. Between them they designed many splendid streets and edifices: Queen Square, the perfect Palladian ring of The Circus, the grand Assembly Rooms, the Royal Crescent's curve of 30 classical townhouses. By the time Jane Austen moved to Bath in 1801, living here until 1806, it was the most coherent and majestic of cityscapes, even if its fashionability was beginning to wane.

Austen herself wasn't especially enamoured with Bath. She was a creature of the countryside and found the city's superficiality and ostentation overbearing. But it provided rich creative pickings. An entire city obsessed with manners and class was a useful backdrop for her brand of quick-witted, acerbic social commentary. Two of her novels, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, which were first published in one volume in 1818 shortly after Austen's death, are partly set in the city. They offer not only a picture of Bath, but of English high society during the Regency era.

Balls and parties were an integral part of fashionable life. Jane herself, as well as *Northanger's* Catherine and *Persuasion's* Anne Elliot, attended gatherings at Bath's Assembly Rooms, opened in 1771, where four public rooms – the Octagon, Ball Room, Card Room and Tea Room – allowed for all sorts of socialising. The huge 18th-century crystal chandeliers, under which Austen's envoys would have danced and whispered, still dazzle from the soaring ceilings; now the building also houses the Fashion Museum, where you can try on Georgian hats and dresses.

The Pump Room was another must in Austen's time. The beau monde would visit this colonnaded building by Bath Abbey to take either the curative waters or afternoon tea, to listen to the orchestra and to 'parade up and down for an hour, looking at everybody and speaking to no one'. It was during preparatory investigations into the construction of the Pump Room that the remains of the Roman complex were rediscovered. Today, part of this grand meeting place is the excellent Roman Baths museum, where you can descend into an underbelly of ancient pools, temples and hypocausts. However, in the Pump Room's fine main hall, you

can still eat cake and finger sandwiches, and you can still sip the medicinal, if foul-tasting, mineral waters from the King's Spring.

One of the real beauties of Bath is that so much is so unchanged. And not just the landmark buildings but the layout of the streets themselves. For instance, Austen has her players shopping on lively Milsom Street, still one of the city's premier retail rows; look up above the modern shop fronts to the tops of the buildings and you're transported back in time. Austen's characters also promenade Great Pulteney Street – still the city's most impressive Georgian avenue – and take carriages up to the 'lofty, dignified situation' of Camden Place, a little-touristed terrace affording excellent views if you can bear the stiff walk up.

Northanger's Catherine hastens to the Royal Crescent 'to breathe the fresh air of better company' (today many go to visit No. 1, now a museum furnished in 18th-century style). Meanwhile, at the close of *Persuasion*, Anne and her Captain Wentworth reconcile along the tree-lined Gravel Walk, which still connects the Royal Crescent with Queen Square.

Bath has become synonymous with Austen. Despite the destructive Bath Blitz of April 1942 and the so-called 'Sack of Bath' in the 1960s, when ill-thought urban development saw some heritage lost, the Georgian spirit of the city remains. It's easy to envisage the streets filled with ladies in their white gloves and empire-line dresses, and gents in their tailcoats and cravats. Come during the annual autumn Jane Austen Festival and you don't even need to imagine, as Catherine Morland and Anne Elliot-alikes really do flood the streets, their slippers and gauze gowns grazing the cobbles – Austen's creations come to life.

Which? *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens (1839)

What? Den of grime and crime, where the tale of an orphan augured British social reform

LONDON

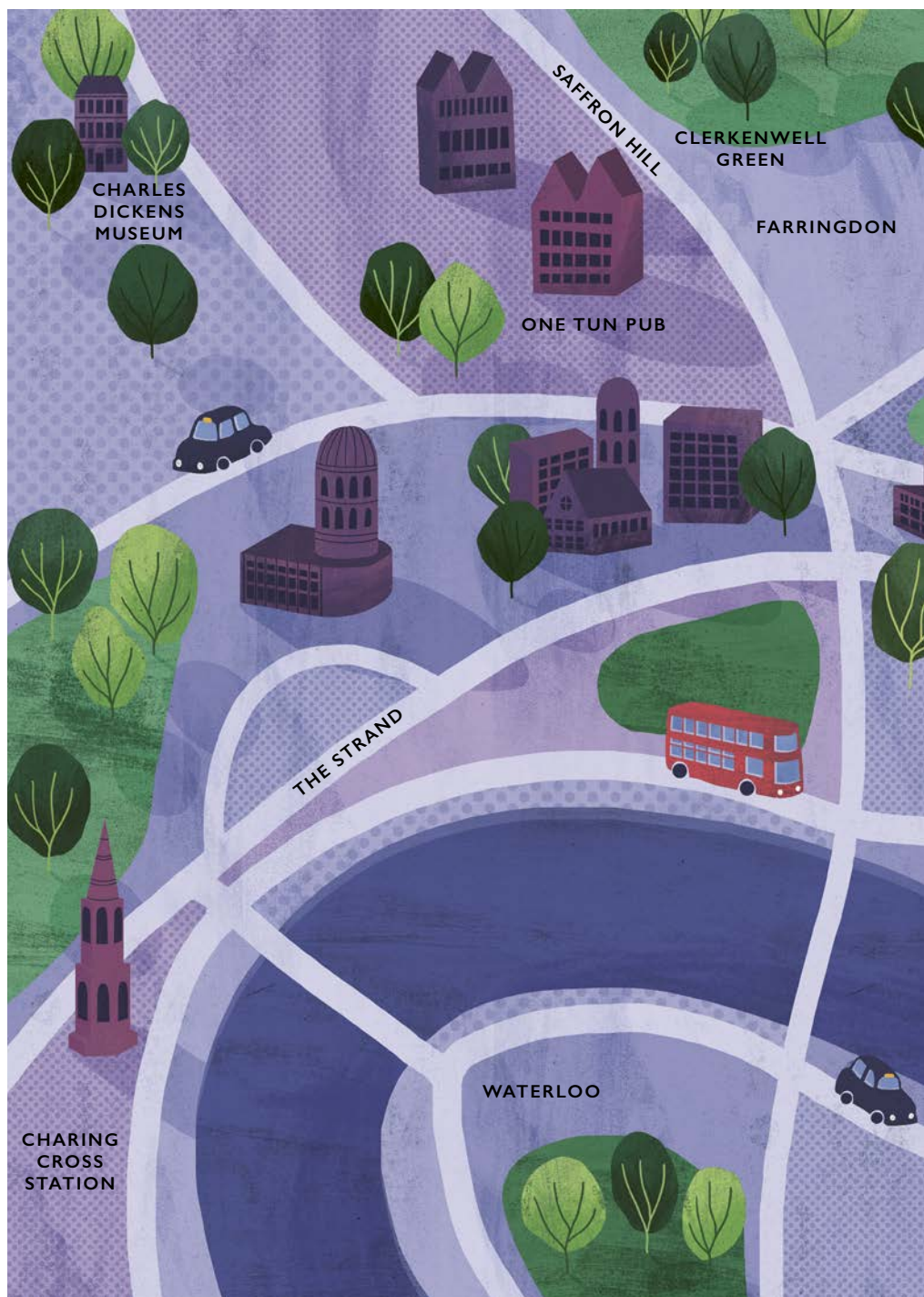
THIS CITY is a still labyrinth; a confusion of hither-thither streets, grunge and clamour, too many people. The pea-soup fog and miasma of desperation have largely lifted, but many a corner still conjures up the past. When the constant din was of horse-clatter, cab-rattle and peddler-patter. When the streets were packed with prostitutes, pickpockets, fraudsters, gangsters, ragamuffins and the piteously poor. When crime was so rife, your handkerchief might be pinched at one end of an alley and hawked back to you at the other. A city writ larger than life; wondrous and wretched in equal measure ...

All of London is laced with Charles Dickens. It seems there's barely a pub he didn't drink in, a street he didn't stroll. Moreover, he painted so strong a portrait of the UK capital at the beginning of the Victorian age that, while the city has existed for over 2,000 years, 'Dickens' London' is the incarnation that most vividly endures.

Charles Dickens was born in Portsmouth in 1812. When his father was sent to debtors' prison in 1822, young Charles was sent to work at a boot-polish warehouse on Hungerford Steps (now the site of London's Charing Cross Station). The experience left a lasting impression, fermenting his views on socioeconomic reform and the heinous labour conditions borne by the underclasses – a situation that got worse when the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act stopped virtually all financial aid to the poverty stricken. At this time, London was the world's biggest city, an imperial and industrial powerhouse. But it was seething with destitution and class division.

Into this arena came *Oliver Twist*. Dickens' second major work, the novel pulled no punches, describing with ruthless satire the







levels of crime and depravity rife in the capital. For fictional Oliver – like so many real Londoners – the city's streets were full of 'foul and frowsy dens, where vice is closely packed and lacks the room to turn'. Via the tale of the workhouse orphan who ends up embroiled with Fagin's gang, Dickens shone a gaslight on the horrors of life on the margins in mid-19th-century Britain.

Dickens saw the sordidness first-hand. In 1837 he moved to 48 Doughty Street in Holborn, where he wrote *Oliver Twist*. Dickens was a great wanderer, and the streets he paced seeped into his pages. And the areas around his former home, which is now the Charles Dickens Museum, still whisper of the past.

A little east of Doughty Street lie the alleyways of Clerkenwell. In the early 19th century this was one of London's most squalid, crime-ridden neighbourhoods, teeming with thieves and hoodlums. In the 1860s an improvement project cleared the 'rookeries' (slums) and Clerkenwell was transformed. However, you can still walk across Clerkenwell Green, where Oliver watches in horror as the Artful Dodger pickpockets Mr Brownlow. And you can still, like Dodger, 'scud at a rapid pace' along the nearby alleys towards Saffron Hill. Named for the spice that was grown here in the Middle Ages (to mask the taste of rotten meat), in Dickens' time this was the site of an infamous rookery beside the sewage-stinking Fleet Ditch. Saffron Hill is now a nondescript sinew of offices and apartments but there's atmosphere within The One Tun pub. Founded in 1759, but rebuilt in 1875, it's reputed to be the basis for Dickens' Three Cripples, the favourite haunt of murderous villain Bill Sikes. Field Lane, the location of Fagin's lair, was demolished in the clear-up, but probably stood a little south of the pub, near where Saffron Hill meets Charterhouse Street.

Continue further south and you end up before Lady Justice and the Old Bailey, the country's Central Criminal Court. Part of it is built on the site of Newgate Prison, a gaol since the 12th century, whose 'dreadful walls ... have hidden so much misery'. Dickens witnessed a public execution here, and sent Fagin to its gallows – in *Oliver Twist*, the bad 'uns get their comeuppance, the good live happily ever after. For Victorian London's real working classes, life was seldom so fair. But through his words, Dickens ensured they were not ignored.



Which? *Wuthering Heights* by
Emily Brontë (1847)

What? Wild, windswept English
landscape, as savage as
Heathcliff himself

YORKSHIRE MOORS

THE LANDSCAPE is brooding. A gunmetal sky hangs low over the barren, boundless moor; muting its palette to olive greens, tarnished golds, bruise purples. Its apparent emptiness belies secret treachery.

This is nature as obstacle course: a hidden gauntlet of engulfing marshes, dangerous roots, deep hollows and dark swamps. The weather is wild too. A north wind whips over the rise by the old stone ruin, quivering the heather; distorting the lone fir tree, making it cower in fright. Or maybe it's not wind at all that's blowing but the spirits that haunt this moor, as tempestuous in death as they were in life ...

When describing *Wuthering Heights*, painter-poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti called it 'a fiend of a book' where 'the action is laid in hell'. That 'hell' is the Yorkshire Moors, a swathe of rolling hills, dales and heather-cloaked heath in northern England, bleakly beautiful. But the moors are more than the setting for Emily Brontë's only novel, a strange, savage tale of love and revenge. They are the actor-director – stealing scenes, shaping characters, influencing action, defining mood.

The moors of *Wuthering Heights* are far removed from the rest of the world. As well as being geographically isolated, they seem to exist outside of the rules of man. Few niceties are observed here; rather, life is lived at the whim of Mother Nature. At times the moors are nurturing and benign, full of gurgling streams, singing larks, humming bees and harebells. They offer star-crossed lovers Catherine and Heathcliff liberation from domestic violence and



social constraints. However, more often the moors are brutal, a Hades howling with gales and ghosts.

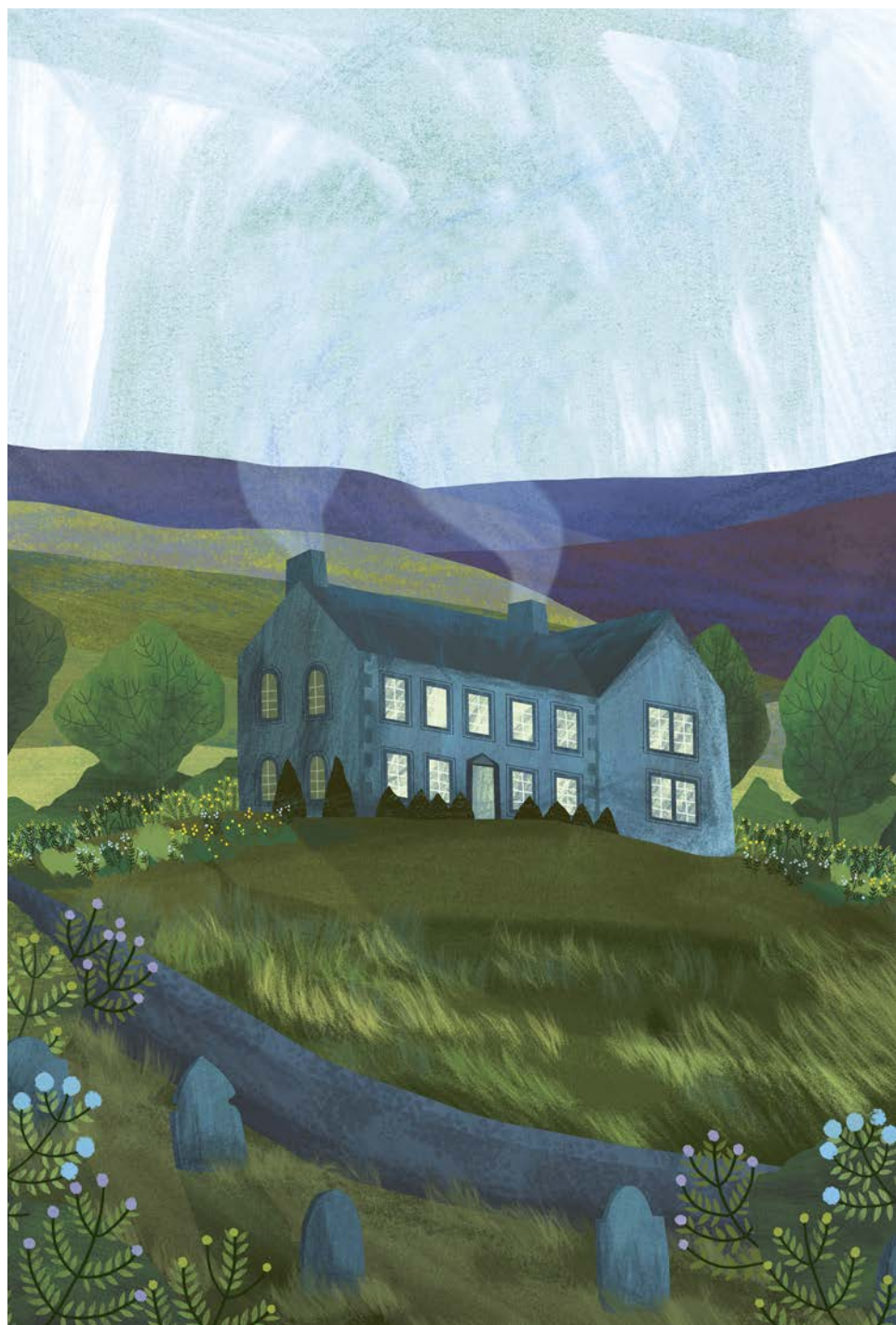
It was a landscape Emily Brontë knew well. From 1820, the Brontë family (including Emily's novelist sisters, Charlotte and Anne) lived in the parsonage at Haworth, a hard-working Pennine village producing worsted yarn and cloth. At the time, industrialisation was rebalancing England, from a mainly rural to a mostly urban society. Haworth – not so far from the powerhouses of Leeds and Manchester – was both: a crowded, polluted centre set high on the moors' edge, open country just beyond. Emily Brontë would often escape into that hinterland, and it suffused her writing; Charlotte called her 'a nursling of the moors'. Emily found inspiration in the rocks, crags and waterfalls, and understood nature as both a destructive and soothing force.

The novel's two main locations, Wuthering Heights (the Earnshaw home) and Thrushcross Grange (home of the well-to-do Lintons), are just 6.5 kilometres (4 miles) apart but distinct in personality – like their fictional owners. The former sits high on the tops, chill and gloomy; the latter nestles in the valley, more civilised and refined.

Wuthering Heights is believed to be based on Top Withens, a long-abandoned 16th-century farmhouse a few miles southwest of Haworth. Its structure doesn't match Emily's creation, but its remote, windswept position fits the bill. Walk across the moor from Haworth parsonage – now the Brontë Museum – to reach the exposed stone ruin and it's easy to think yourself into the pages of a Gothic romance.

Architecturally, a more likely candidate for Wuthering Heights is Ponden Hall, a manorial farmhouse near Haworth, which suits in size and style, if not situation. Actually Ponden is more usually cited as the model for Thrushcross Grange. Built largely in 1634, and extensively rebuilt in 1801 (the year in which the novel begins), Ponden did have a long, tree-lined drive like Thrushcross, but it lacks the grandeur and grounds that Emily describes. However, the Brontës visited regularly, and Emily would read in the extensive library.

Ponden Hall is currently a B&B. Now anyone can book the 'Earnshaw Room' to sleep in its 18th-century-style box bed and peep out of the tiny window in the thick stone wall. Though be warned that your dreams might meander the wind-raged moors, and you might hear the ghosts demanding to be let in ...



Which? *Palace Walk* by Naguib Mahfouz (1956)

What? Medieval Egyptian labyrinth of mosques, souks and secrets

CAIRO

PEEK THROUGH the *mashrabiya* window: what lies beyond? This boxed-in balcony, concealed by a carapace of woodwork and lattice, allows furtive glimpses to the bustle below. Down there

is another world – of barbers and bean-sellers, street hawkers, brass workers, stereo blare, human traffic; of lamb kofta on hot coals, bitter-black coffee and sacks of spice; of the sweet smoke of *sheesha* pipes, wafting like restless *jinn*s (genies). Out there, life ebbs and flows, roars, revolts, moves on. A world whizzing by, oblivious to the eyes peering down from behind the screen ...

Naguib Mahfouz's *Palace Walk* is a literary look through the *mashrabiya* – gazing out and gazing in. Part one of Mahfouz's Cairo Trilogy, it demystifies the rituals, rhythms and ructions present in the Arabic world at the beginning of the 20th century. Indeed, it's less a novel than a rich carpet, woven with both the story of Egypt at a time of upheaval and the intricacies of urban Muslim family life, with its faith, fears, love and oppression.

This was a tumultuous period in Egyptian history. Britain had grasped control of the country in the 1880s and, in 1914, it became an official British protectorate. However, when the First World War came to a close, but hoped-for Egyptian independence did not come with it, nationalist fervour began to bubble. All strands of society – educated elite and working-class masses, Cairenes and country dwellers, Muslims and Christians, men and women – were united in a bid to be rid of their colonisers. It was the original Arab Spring.







Mahfouz witnessed the chaos first-hand. As a child he lived in the al-Gamaliyya area of Islamic Cairo, the city's oldest neighbourhood, and saw protests outside his window. Later, having learned his literary skills from the storytellers of the *ashwa* (coffee houses) – then great hubs of cultural debate and exchange – he wove these early experiences into his epic trilogy: *Palace Walk*, *Palace of Desire* and *Sugar Street*. *Palace Walk*, which runs from 1917 to the 1919 nationalist revolution, is a story of the sights, sounds and souls of Islamic Cairo at a defining moment.

The novel was published in 1956 under the Arabic title *Bayn al-Qasrayn* (*Between the Two Palaces*), the name of the old city's chief thoroughfare but also a nod to Egypt's cultural and political transition. The wider public turmoil is channelled through the personal saga of the al-Jawad family: despotic, philandering patriarch Abd al-Jawad, his subjugated wife Amina and their five children. Since marrying 25 years previously, Amina has been a virtual prisoner in her own home, viewing the world beyond only through the latticework windows. But one day, when her husband is away, she ventures out ...

Amina, face veiled, draped in black cloth and escorted by her younger son, leaves the house on Bayn al-Qasrayn to walk along the backstreets of Islamic Cairo and visit the Al-Hussein Mosque, supposed burial spot of the head of Hussein, Mohammed's grandson. Here, Amina, so long locked up, proceeds to 'devour the place with greedy, curious eyes: the walls, ceiling, pillars, carpets, chandeliers, pulpit, and the *mihrab* niches ... How often she had longed to visit this site.' The mosque is off limits to non-Muslims. But a stroll amid the same timeless alleys is not.

While the Egyptian capital is now a mega-sprawl – the biggest in the Arabic world – in Islamic Cairo, the streets narrow and modernity melts away; in parts it feels little different from when the Fatimid Caliphate first founded their new city here in AD 969. From the 10th to the 12th centuries the Fatimids constructed a great walled citadel, sliced by the main thoroughfare of Bayn al-Qasrayn. This 'Palace Walk' runs north–south linking Bab al-Futah and Bab Zuweila; between these turreted medieval gates lies an open-air museum of dishevelled palaces, dusty caravanserais, *adhan*-calling minarets, forgotten tombs, underground cisterns and fit-to-burst bazaars. From it, alleyways run off into quiet squares and Aladdin's caves of tat and treasures.

Working northwards from Bab Zuweila, you first pass the Al Ghouri *wikala*, a beautifully restored 16th-century hostel for African merchants where Sufis still gather to do their whirling dance and where artisans sell local crafts. Comprehensive shopping possibilities lie a little further to the east, where, adjacent to the Al-Hussein Mosque is the crazy maze of Khan el-Khalili. Turn two corners in this labyrinthine souk and you're lost amid an avalanche of bric-a-brac, stuffed into an impossible tangle of alleys. Mahfouz used to write and people-watch in the El-Fishawy Café, Khan el-Khalili's oldest coffee house, though these days its scuffed wooden chairs and cracked marble-topped tables are more frequented by tourists than Nobel laureates.

Beyond this is the gold-sellers' souk, the awesome mausoleum and *madrassa* (Islamic school) of Qalawun, the 12th-century Al-Aqmar Mosque and the 10th-century Al-Hakim Mosque, the street's oldest building. And somewhere in the middle is Beshtak Palace. This 14th-century home of a rich *amir* occupies the site of Mahfouz's fictional al-Jawad family home. The interior is exquisite, with its marble floors and coloured glass. You won't, of course, find Amina trapped inside, but you can imagine it: at first-floor level, dark-wood *mashrabiya* windows project over the street, exactly the sort of secretive boxes from which she might have viewed the comings and goings of a world both unchanged for centuries and in dangerous flux. A world she wasn't permitted to enter.

Which? *Burger's Daughter* by
Nadine Gordimer (1979)

What? Turbulent township at the
centre of South Africa's
apartheid-era struggles

SOWETO

SPRAWLING ACROSS the veld, this confusing, suppurating place sits apart from the bright, big city, separated. not just by geography, but by dilapidation and the sharp end of history. Here in the township, rotten roads crawl through ordered ugliness, row upon row of unlovely houses. Tin shacks lean on each other like drunks; drunks sway between old cars and half-crazed chickens; junk piles up down dirty alleys where tramps forage and stray dogs cock a leg. The air smells of urine, offal, liquor, despair. This is the land across the divide; the black backyard. A dumping ground. A crucible for social change ...

In the second half of the 20th century, South Africa was a deplorably fractured nation. The Afrikaner National Party adopted the policy of apartheid (separateness) in 1948, institutionalising existing racial discrimination. People were required to live in areas according to ethnicity; black-only townships were created and millions were forcibly moved. Mixed marriages were prohibited, and schools, buses, even park benches were segregated. Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* was published in 1979, when apartheid – 'the dirtiest social swindle the world has ever known' – still wracked the country. Initially banned for being dangerous and indecent, it's a striking work of historical fiction in which the suffering is all too real.

The novel centres on Rosa Burger, daughter of prominent white Afrikaner anti-apartheid protesters Lionel and Cathy Burger – both of whom are imprisoned for their beliefs, both of whom die in prison cells. Rosa has been raised in a highly politicised household

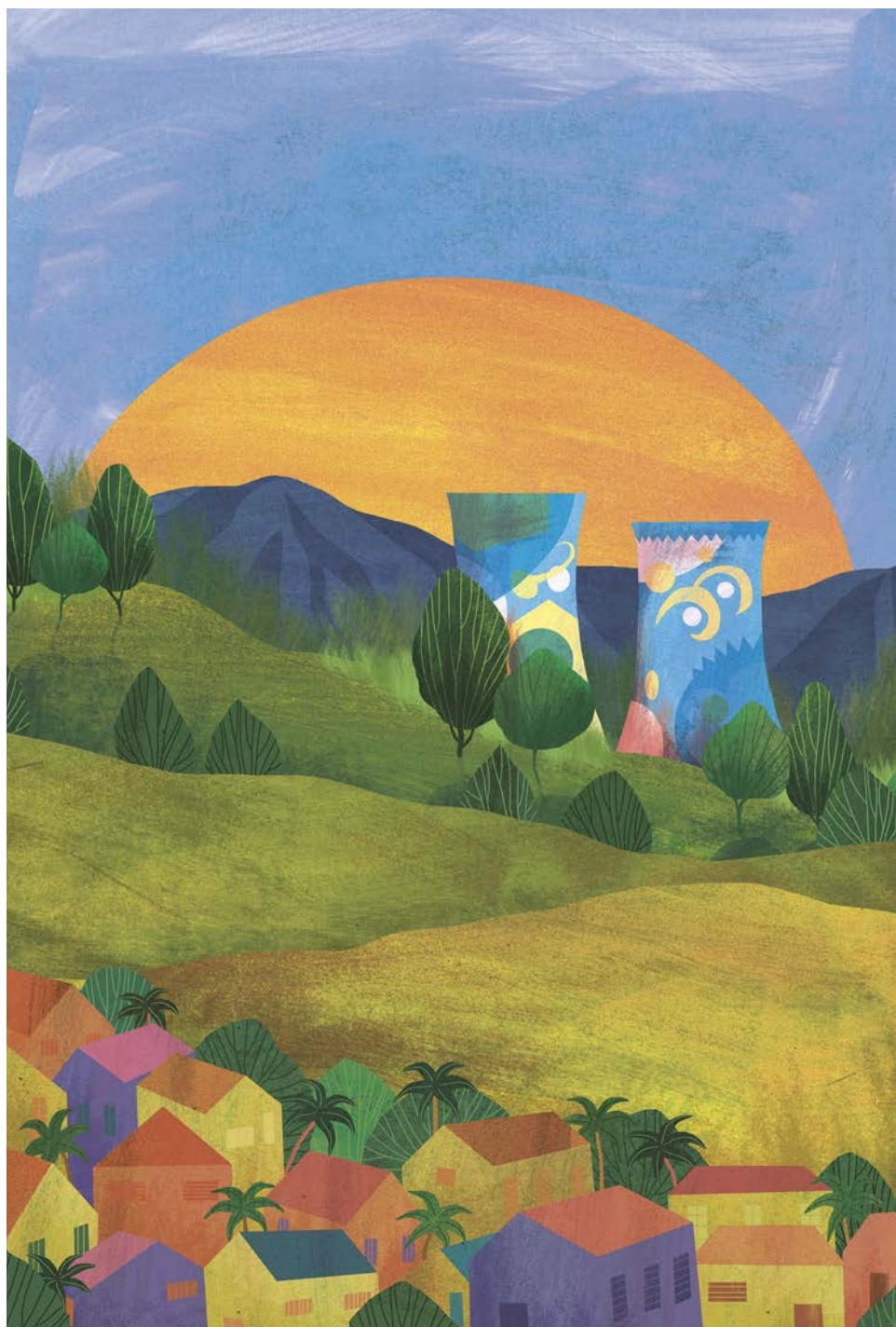


in Johannesburg, where races splashed together in the pool and shared *boerewors* (sausages) and ideologies around the *braai* (barbecue). With her parents gone, Rosa is forced to find her own identity – but, whatever her personal struggles, she can't escape the political. Racism is an intrinsic part of daily life at this time. And nowhere is this more evident than in the township of Soweto.

The South West Townships, southwest of Johannesburg, were first created to move blacks away from the city and its white suburbs to areas separated by *cordons sanitaires* (sanitary corridors), such as rivers or railways. Soweto quickly became the largest black city in South Africa, deprived and angry. Rosa speaks of its 'restless broken streets' filled with the 'litter of twice-discarded possessions first thrown out by the white man and then picked over by the black'. In Soweto, families try to get by in small, overcrowded homes surrounded by ordure, urchins and *tsotsi* (thugs), while enraged youths denounce the regime. In both real life and Gordimer's novel, the situation erupted in 1976, when a ruling that the Afrikaans language be used in schools triggered the Soweto Uprising. The riots were violently quashed – 176 students were killed – but trouble continued on and off until South Africa's first multiracial elections in 1994.

Soweto, like South Africa, has moved on since. The huge township has areas of desperate poverty but also middle-class suburbs and millionaires. And where once only the bravest traveller ventured here, now it's a Johannesburg must-see. Joining a tour is safest, and will take in key sites: the Hector Pieterse Memorial and Museum, named for the first child killed during the 1976 Uprising; Vilakazi Street, where two Nobel Peace Prize winners – Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu – once lived; the graffitied cooling towers of the Orlando power station, now used for bungee jumping. There's also a chance to see ordinary Soweto – to drink a mug of *umqombothi* (maize beer) at a shebeen, to join a hallelujah-ing congregation in a tin-roofed church, to browse stalls selling sweets and intestines and ingenious items crafted from trash.

In 1991, the year after Mandela was released from prison and the year apartheid was officially repealed, Nadine Gordimer won the Nobel Prize in Literature for 'epic writing ... of very great benefit to humanity'. *Burger's Daughter* merges fiction and fact, using stories to help heal the real world.



Which? *The God of Small Things*
by Arundhati Roy (1997)

What? Lush South Indian state
where love and tragedy
brew amid the languid
backwaters

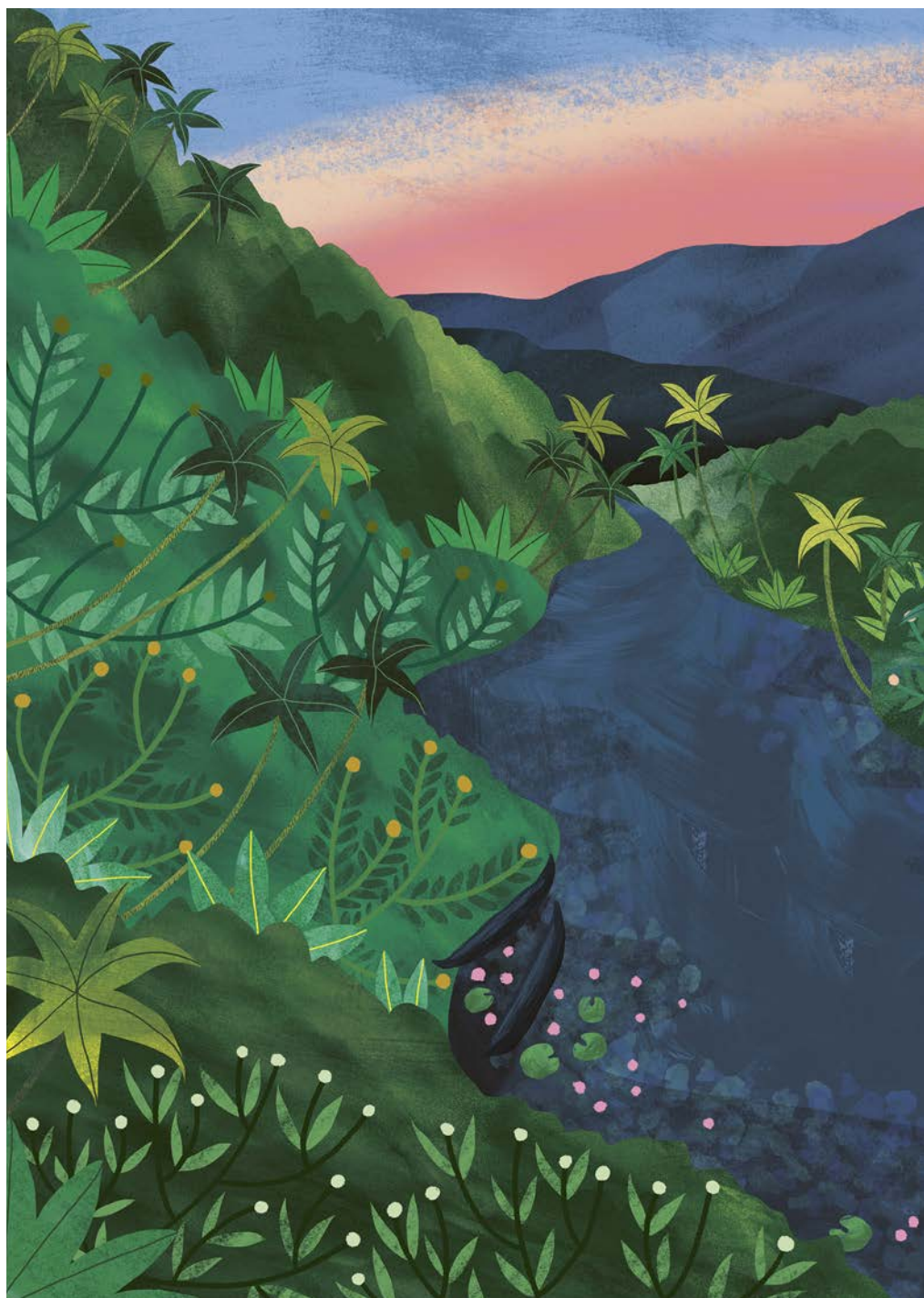
KERALA

THE AFTERNOON is heavy, hazy, lazy; the viscid air, damp as an unwrung sponge, awaits the imminent squeeze of the monsoon. For now, it's curry-hot, the sun beating indiscriminately on red ants and yellow bullfrogs, whooping coucals and long-legged lily-trotters. It glitters on the corpses of silver fish. It nurtures the mango and jackfruit. Then, finally, the sky cracks. The heavens empty onto Kerala. Under this deluge, the paddies, palm trees and plantations flush even greener. And the channels swell to their limits, no longer languid but deceptively angry. The sort of spate that might make bad things – small bad things, big bad things – occur ...

Indian author Arundhati Roy trained as an architect, which perhaps shouldn't come as a surprise. Because her debut novel, *The God of Small Things*, is like a 2D blueprint conjured into 3D reality. Kerala oozes off its pages. It's less a book than a deep pool of colour, fragrance, heat, history and politics stirred by love and loss, sentences rippling like backwaters.

The novel, which won the 1997 Booker Prize, takes place largely in the village of Ayemenem, shifting in time between 1969 and 1993 in a series of flashbacks and foreshadowing. It follows boy and girl twins, Estha and Rahel, who live with their mother Ammu and her family – grandmother Mammachi, grand-aunt Baby Kochamma – and whose lives are upturned when their half-English cousin, Sophie Mol, drowns in the nearby river. The waterways that attract so many outsiders to this dream-like patch of the subcontinent – touted by the Kerala tourist board as 'God's Own Country' – become a deadly heart of darkness.







The book is as sensorially delicious as one of Mammachi's Paradise Pickles & Preserves. It is a mouth-waterer of banana jam, fresh coconut, hot *parippu vadas* (lentil fritters), cardamom and cinnamon, red fish curry, black tamarind. There are crows feasting on fat mangoes and fireflies flickering in the darkness. There are vibrant saris and tucked-up *mundus*. There are shanty huts leaning into the heat and colonial, teak-shuttered bungalows with deep verandas where it's always cool. There is the 'sicksweet smell of old roses on a breeze'.

But *The God of Small Things* also draws bigger issues into focus. For around 3,000 years Indian society was shaped by the caste system. Among the world's oldest forms of social stratification, this class structure divided Hindus into four main groups: at the top, Brahmins (intellectuals), then Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers), Vaishyas (traders) and Shudras (labourers). Outside of this were the Dalits or 'untouchables', the lowest of the low. Members of different castes lived apart, drank from separate wells, could not marry, often would not touch.

Although the Indian Constitution of 1950 outlawed the caste system and status-based discrimination, the old ways proved hard to shake. This long-standing hierarchy, which extended beyond Hinduism into wider society, persisted; unwritten rules continued to be upheld and individuals remained limited by their rank. Certainly in *The God of Small Things*, the caste system still determines what Roy calls the Love Laws: 'the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much'. For Ammu, a higher-class Syrian Christian, to be in a relationship with the handyman Velutha – a Paravan, one of the 'untouchables' – is not conscionable at all. When the 'laws' are broken, tragedy ensues.

Ayemenem is a fictionalised version of Aymanam, in Kerala's Kottayam District, where Roy spent time as a child. The village name (meaning 'five forests') refers to the woodland that once thrived here, alongside the Meenachil River. Now paddy fields cloak much of the area and frenetic, traffic-jammed Kottayam town has seeped towards the old village, injecting greater bustle.

There are a few old Hindu temples to visit – the Vishnu-dedicated Sree Narasimha Swamy and mural-daubed Pandavam Shasta temples. However, you won't find an exact replica of the novel's 'Ayemenem House', though the building is not entirely made up. Roy borrowed parts of two family homes to construct her

fictional nexus. Puliampallil House and Shanti House stand on adjacent plots at the end of a path of rubber trees, along from the village school. Puliampallil is a fine early-20th century home 'with its steep gabled roof pulled over its ears like a low hat', while Shanti dates from the 1960s. The river flows across the fields behind, towards Lake Vembanad.

The 'History House', where the book's most tragic events occur, is not on the other side of the river in the middle of an abandoned rubber estate. The real home of 'Kari Saipu' – aka Alfred Baker, one of a family of English missionaries who'd 'gone native', spoke Malayalam (Kerala's official language) and wore *mundus* – is actually a little way away, in the Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary. The Bakers developed the sanctuary in the mid-19th century, and it's now a haven for Indian darters, white Ibis, Siberian cranes and other resident and migratory birds. The 'History House' bungalow is now part of the Taj Garden Retreat.

In her novel, Roy laments how Kerala has kowtowed to tourist tastes: the heritage buildings that are now hotels, the hours'-long *kathakali* dances that have been abridged for impatient foreigners. It's true that *kettuvallam* houseboats now tote visitors rather than rice and spice along the backwaters. But while boarding one of these restored-for-tourists vessels for a slow cruise has become a cliché, it remains the best way to see Kerala – the best way to spot its wonderful small things.

Which? *The Quiet American* by
Graham Greene (1955)

What? Historic Vietnamese
avenue evoking exoticism
and espionage

SAIGON (HO CHI MINH CITY)

THE HEAT hangs thick as a shroud. Only the beer is cool. Sipping slowly, you gaze at the road, screwing your eyes against the flat, fierce sun – and against the passage of time. Trishaw bells are now drowned by

waspy motorcycles; Versace and Burger King have replaced the silk stores and milk bars. But this old thoroughfare – with its vestiges of vintage grandeur, its constant ebb and flow – still feels like the epicentre of Saigon. A street where blood and secrets were once spilt over seven o'clocktails; where privileged outsiders chewed over the fate of a nation ...

The rue Catinat is one of the oldest streets in Saigon, and one that's had many identities. Originally Sixth Road, in 1865 the French rechristened it Catinat after the warship that helped them conquer Indochina – an unsubtle reminder of who was now in control. After Vietnamese independence from France in 1954, the name was changed to Tu Do (Freedom) Street, and soon thronged with loose-living American GIs who took the freedom at face value. After the Vietnam War, the Vietcong titled it Dong Khoi (Uprising) Street – the name it still bears today.

But it was Catinat when Graham Greene was working as a war correspondent in the city from 1951 to 1954. And it's this incarnation of the street – opium steeped, battle scarred, on the cusp of change – that forms the spine of *The Quiet American*. Greene's tale of world-weary British journo Thomas Fowler, his Vietnamese girlfriend Phuong and the titular US government worker Alden Pyle is a love triangle, murder mystery and political parable set against the backdrop of the First Indochina War. Most of



the conflicts between French forces and the communist Viet Minh occurred in northern Vietnam, but the whole country was affected, including far-south Saigon; including the glamorous expat enclave of rue Catinat.

Greene's Saigon is dangerous, languorous and vividly exotic. Beautiful girls cycle in white silk trousers, locals in 'mollusc hats' shoulder pole-slung baskets and fortune-tellers squat under trees with soiled packs of cards. It's vermouth cassis, opium smoke and the constant dice clicks of games of *quatre cent vingt-et-un*. Today, rue Catinat/Dong Khoi isn't so evocatively other. Big brands and sleek malls have moved in. But glimmers of the past remain.

At the top end of Dong Khoi, on Paris Square, sit the red-brick Notre Dame Cathedral – 'hideous', according to Greene – and the Central Post Office, a handsome colonial relic with its barrel-vaulted hall and historic maps of South Vietnam and Saigon.

Heading southeastwards down the street, past shiny banks and the occasional old building, you reach the Continental. Built in 1880, this classic hotel is where Fowler always has his 6pm beer on the terrace, and where he first meets Pyle; the bar is indoors and air-conditioned these days, though a handful of tables line the pavement. Greene himself used to stay here, in corner room 214, believing it best placed to observe the happenings down in Lam Son square. In *The Quiet American*, Lam Son (the Place Garnier) is where a deadly car bomb explodes. It's also home of Phuong's favourite milk bar, which Greene based on the real Givral Café – lately demolished to make way for the Union Square mall.

Further down, at 8 Dong Khoi, is the dome-topped Grand Hotel. Dating from the 1930s, this colonial-style edifice had been converted into rented apartments during Greene's tenure, and served as the model for Fowler's room over the rue Catinat. After a substantial renovation in 1998, the Grand is now one of the city's grandest; hard to imagine the opium smoke and black-trousered women chattering on the landings now.

At 7pm, Fowler – like so many of Saigon's burnt-out expats – would head to the Rooftop Bar of the Majestic. You can still do the same. The hotel opened in 1925 and remains the best place to be at sundown, to sip a cocktail and drink in the cool, unchanging breeze from the Saigon River.



Which? *The Kite Runner* by
Khaled Hosseini (2003)

What? Afghan capital and Silk
Road city of ancient
culture cut down by
modern tragedy

KABUL

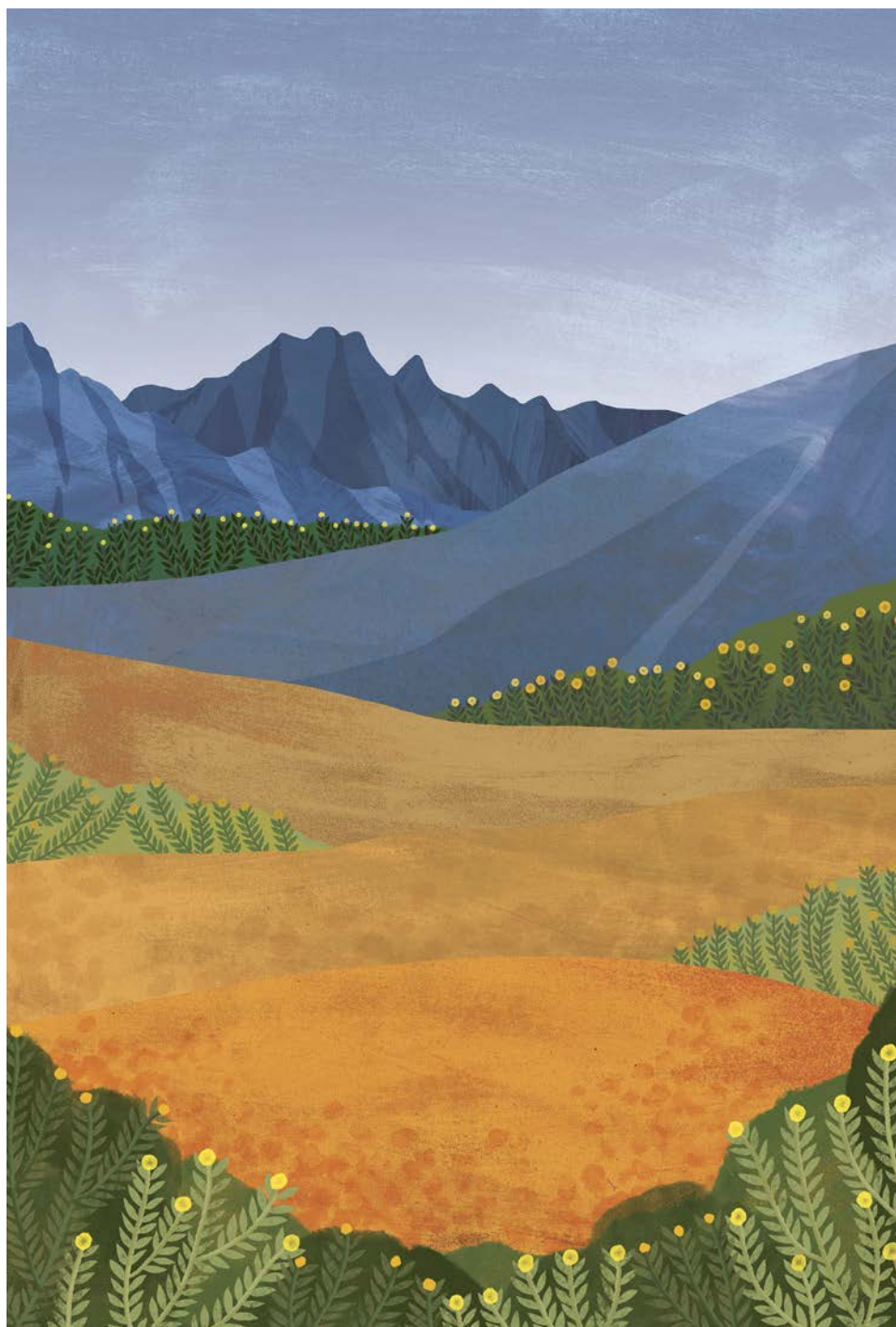
LIFE PICKS itself up, shakes itself off and continues at the bazaar. Despite the ever-present mess and menace, crowds still throng to the pastry shops, spice sacks and rails of knock-off T-shirts – even in times

of turmoil, one needs to dress and eat. People flow around the bloody, hook-hung carcasses and the severed sheeps' heads. They step around loaded wheelbarrows and the spewed pulp of pomegranates, oozing like entrails. They crouch on their haunches, haggle for phones and sit in cafés, sipping glasses of sweet black tea. They breathe in the smells of grilling lamb, diesel, dust and destruction – the intoxicating perfume of the ancient city and its current troubles ...

The Kite Runner is as close to Afghanistan as most of us will ever get. The Central Asian nation of harsh desert, breath-stealing mountains and tribal loyalties is one of the most dangerous in the world. But no government travel advisory precludes taking a trip there via the words of Khaled Hosseini, whose debut novel speaks of both the vibrancy of late-20th-century Afghanistan and the horrors that have torn it apart.

Kabul has existed for around 3,500 years. Tucked between the mighty Hindu Kush mountains, it was long a strategic stop for traders toting their silks and spices between Europe and Asia. It became capital of Afghanistan in 1776.

The Kite Runner begins in 1970s Kabul, the story of young friends Amir, a wealthy Pashtun, and Hassan, a poor Hazara, whose lives are shaped by loyalty, cowardice, ethnicity and political upheaval. Their passion is kite-fighting, the local pastime of choice,



which sees boys – always boys – send their missives of bamboo and bright tissue paper into the skies to do battle with other fliers. The string is coated with a resin of glue and crushed glass, rendering it sharp enough to cut down an opponent; running to collect the vanquished kite from where it falls is the ultimate trophy.

This early Kabul is a revelation. Not only is the air filled with playful, colourful kites, the city seems far from the extremist war zone its name conjures today. The Kabul of the 1950s, 60s and early 70s was surprisingly cosmopolitan and liberal in outlook. There were cocktails and short skirts; the foreigners browsing the bazaars weren't soldiers but hippies, who flocked to the 'Paris of Central Asia'. Hosseini was born in 1965 into this 'golden age' of culturally rich Kabul. He left in 1976 and was later forced into permanent exile in the USA.

The events that shaped the author's life also shape *The Kite Runner*. In 1973, the Communist PDPA staged a coup, Afghanistan's monarchy fell, revolution flared and, in 1979, the Soviet military invaded. Thousands fled to Pakistan and beyond – just like Amir and his father, Baba. After nine blood-soaked years, the Soviets withdrew and civil war erupted. In 1996, the Taliban took control, at first a welcome relief from the infighting. But then the fundamentalist laws rolled in. Thieves were punished by amputation. The 'un-Islamic' flying of kites was banned. Adulterers were stoned to death – in *The Kite Runner*, adult Amir witnesses such an atrocity during halftime at a football match, when he returns to Kabul in 2001. After years of living in the USA, Amir says Kabul is like 'running into an old, forgotten friend and seeing that life hadn't been good to him, that he'd become homeless and destitute'. The city he remembers has become a husk roamed by beggars, strewn with rubble, ruled by fear.

The Kite Runner ends in 2002 – after September 11 and the US invasion of Afghanistan. NATO officially ended its combat mission in the country in 2014, but the country remains complicated, the Taliban resurgent. So Kabul is dangerous – but life rolls on, as it must for those who have no choice. And boys may fly their kites again, over the rooftops and bomb craters, up towards the sun-scorched mountains. Flashes of colour against the dust and the debris, continuing the fight.



Which? *Picnic at Hanging Rock* by
Joan Lindsay (1967)

What? Sinister Australian
formation where
literature has created a
new legend

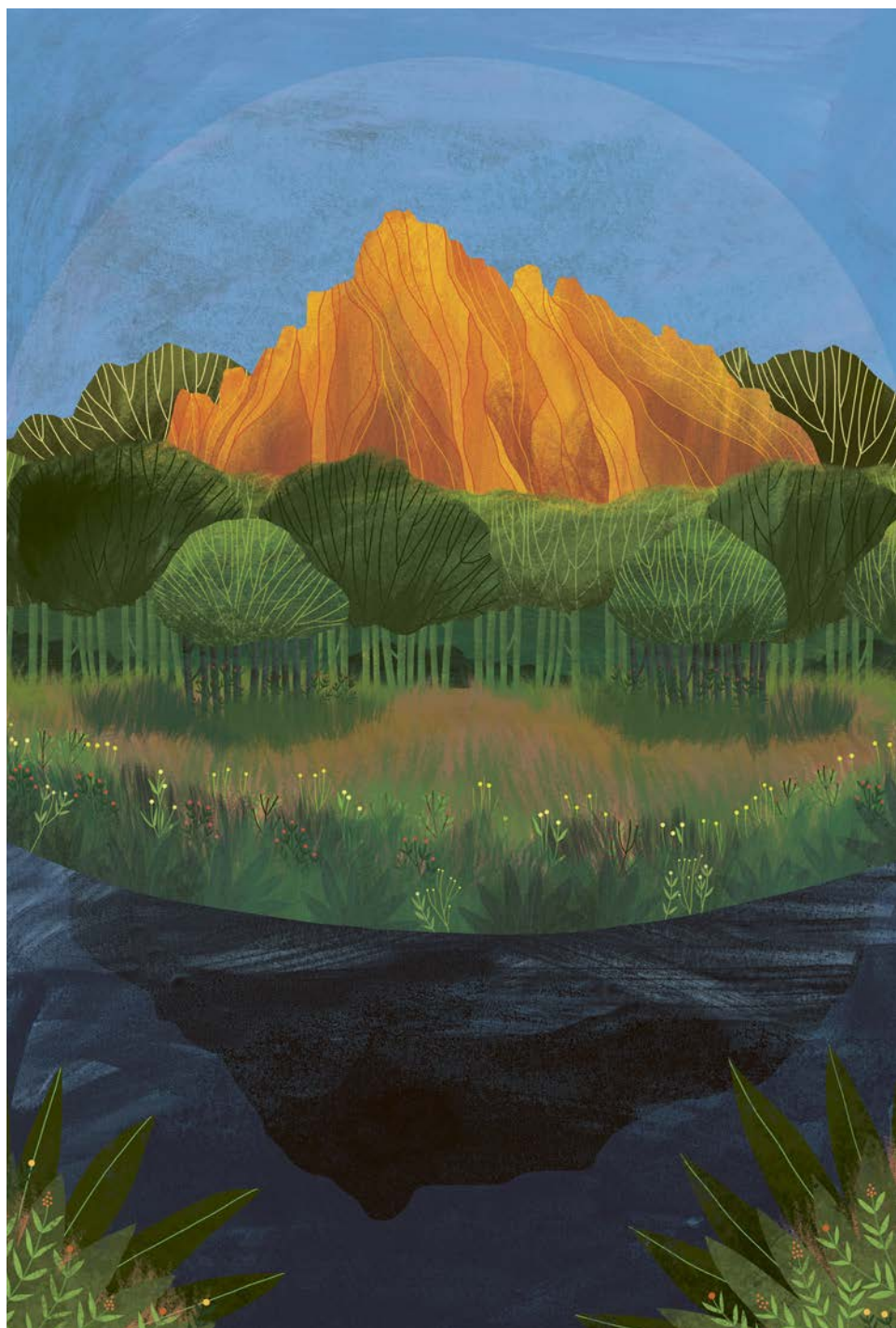
HANGING ROCK

THERE IS the Rock – shrouded in mist, shrouded in mystery. It's an anachronism in the bush, spewed from the earth's belly but now rising from the plains like a man-made Gothic castle of towers and crenellations.

At first the Rock seems empty, but really it scuffles and creeps: snakes coiled, wallabies hunched, grubs rifling the rotten bark, koalas and kookaburras in the eucalyptus trees. And something else. Something that haunts the inky hollows, something that seems able to stop clocks, chill bones and call young girls to their doom ...

Hanging Rock looms large in both the landscape and psyche of Australia. Rare and formidable, it is a mamelon, a mound of stiff magma that erupted, congealed and contracted around six million years ago, and has subsequently weathered to become 'pinnacled like a fortress'. But Hanging Rock is more than a geological quirk. It's become a national symbol of the strange, a place where anything might happen – thanks to Joan Lindsay's classic novel.

According to Lindsay, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* came to her in a series of dreams, so vivid that when she woke she could still sense the breeze blowing through the gum trees and the laughter resounding through the hot air. It tells the story of a fateful boarding-school outing to Hanging Rock on Valentine's Day 1900. Four girls and one of the mistresses disappear without a trace, upturning life at Appleyard College and sending ripples through the wider community. As the book continues, and the mystery remains unsolved, so the 'shadow of the Rock [grows] darker and longer ... a brooding blackness solid as a wall'.

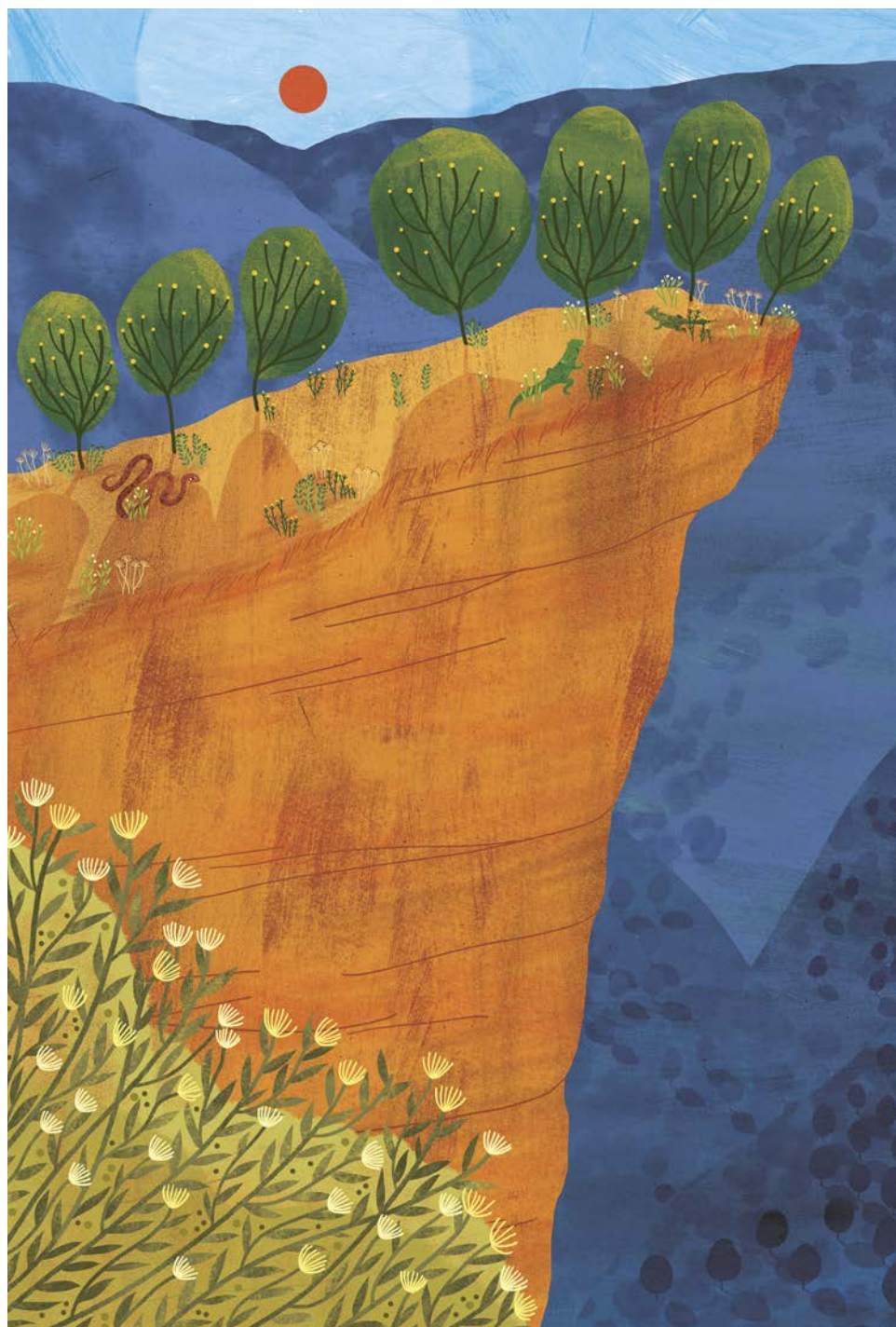


The Rock was a place of loss long before Lindsay's novel. From the 1830s its traditional owners – the Dja Dja Wurrung, Woi Wurrung and Taungurung tribes – were eradicated from the area, either murdered, killed by disease or forced into Aboriginal reserves. Their ancestors had lived on this land for more than 25,000 years and felt deep connections with what they called Ngannelong; initiation ceremonies and *corroborees* were held here, important rituals that connected indigenous people to their creator-spirits. Yet in an instant those ancient bonds were severed by European colonisers who'd been here no more than 50 years. Hanging Rock had always been viewed as special, even supernatural; now it was laced with tragedy. The perfect setting, then, for Lindsay's puzzling, terrible tale.

Some readers have become so obsessed with the myth of the missing girls that, for many, it's become reality. Lindsay herself was ambiguous. In a brief prologue she states: 'Whether *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is fact or fiction my readers must decide for themselves'. Either way, the monstrous Rock is just as the author describes. Located northwest of Melbourne, a little north of Mount Macedon, it rises 105 metres (345 feet) from the Heskett Plains, as extraordinary now as when Miranda, Irma and the rest of the Appleyard girls laid eyes on it over a century ago.

The schoolgirls, surely sweltering in their prim lace collars, corsets and petticoats, travel to Hanging Rock in a covered drag. You'll no longer kick up fine red dust as you drive the Melbourne–Bendigo road but you could pause, as they did, for refreshment in the village of Woodend – the 1896-built hotel is still a serving brewhouse. And, as you drive, you'll still look out at the lines of stringy bark trees, cloud-tufted Mount Macedon and, eventually, the terrible bulk of Hanging Rock itself, which sits within Hanging Rock Recreation Reserve.

Like drag-driver Mr Hussey, you could go to the horse races here – the first official meeting was held at the Hanging Rock track in 1886, and continues twice a year, on New Year's Day and Australia Day. The Reserve also encompasses a visitor centre and, of course, picnic grounds where, like the girls, you can spend an afternoon in exquisite languor, dozing and dreaming, breathing in the wattle and eucalypt, basking with the lizards. There are hiking trails too, leading under the boulders, along precipices and up and around the Rock's summit, which you can follow. If you dare.



Which? *The Catcher in the Rye*
by J.D. Salinger (1951)

What? Big, brash backdrop for
the classic American tale
of disaffected youth

NEW YORK

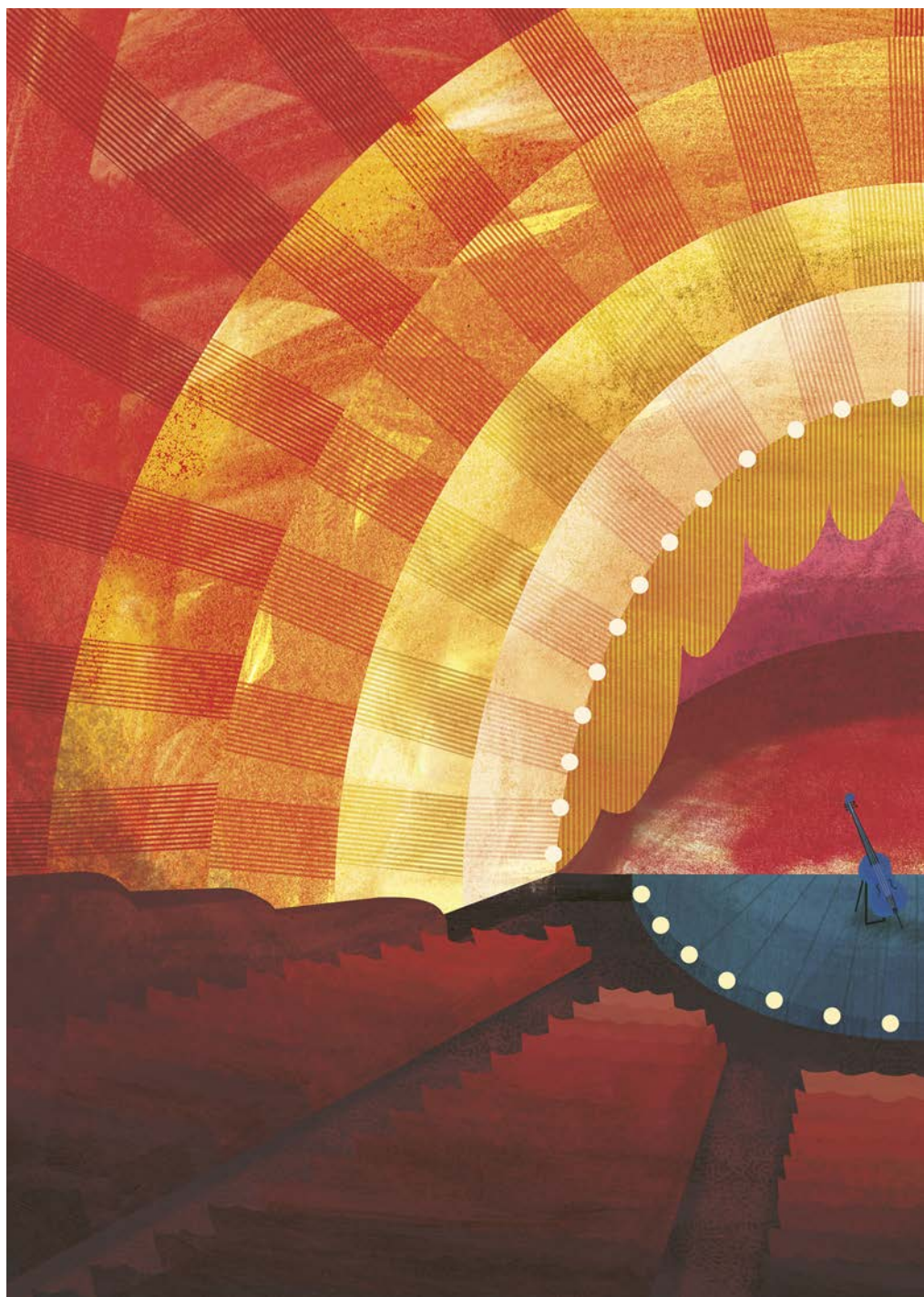
THIS CITY – the most iconic of cities – is a mass of humanity. A seething megapolis of taxi cabs, dive bars, movie stars, uptowners, out-of-towners, priests, pimps, players and phonies. Everyone squeezed in; everything possible. But it can also be the loneliest place in the world, an anonymising anthill of concrete and steel. New York: where you can choose to ride the carousel or step off the kerb into oblivion. Just the place, then, for a troubled teen on the cusp of adulthood to get drunk, laid, lost or saved ...

Holden Caulfield, angsty antihero of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, spoke to a generation. The book contains little action: posh kid gets expelled and spends a few days bumming around New York. But this 16-year-old wise-ass became the poster boy for disaffected youth, beloved for his delicious rebelliousness, his rage against the machine.

And what better setting for this coming-of-age tale than mid-century Manhattan? In 1950, New York was also finding its place, emerging as the biggest and most important city on the planet. It had Wall Street and Broadway, the tallest skyscrapers and the new United Nations. Yet post-war confusion was palpable; hope tinged with fear. *The Catcher in the Rye* is a kind of unorthodox guidebook to the city at a certain moment.

Holden isn't just in New York, he is of it. He was raised on the Upper East Side and, when he's kicked out of his fancy Pennsylvania boarding school, he runs not for the hills but for home. Despite his tender years, he moves effortlessly through the urban clutter of seedy hotels and heaving avenues; he knows where to score a







drink. New York overwhelms and repulses him too but, love or hate it, the city is intrinsic to who he is.

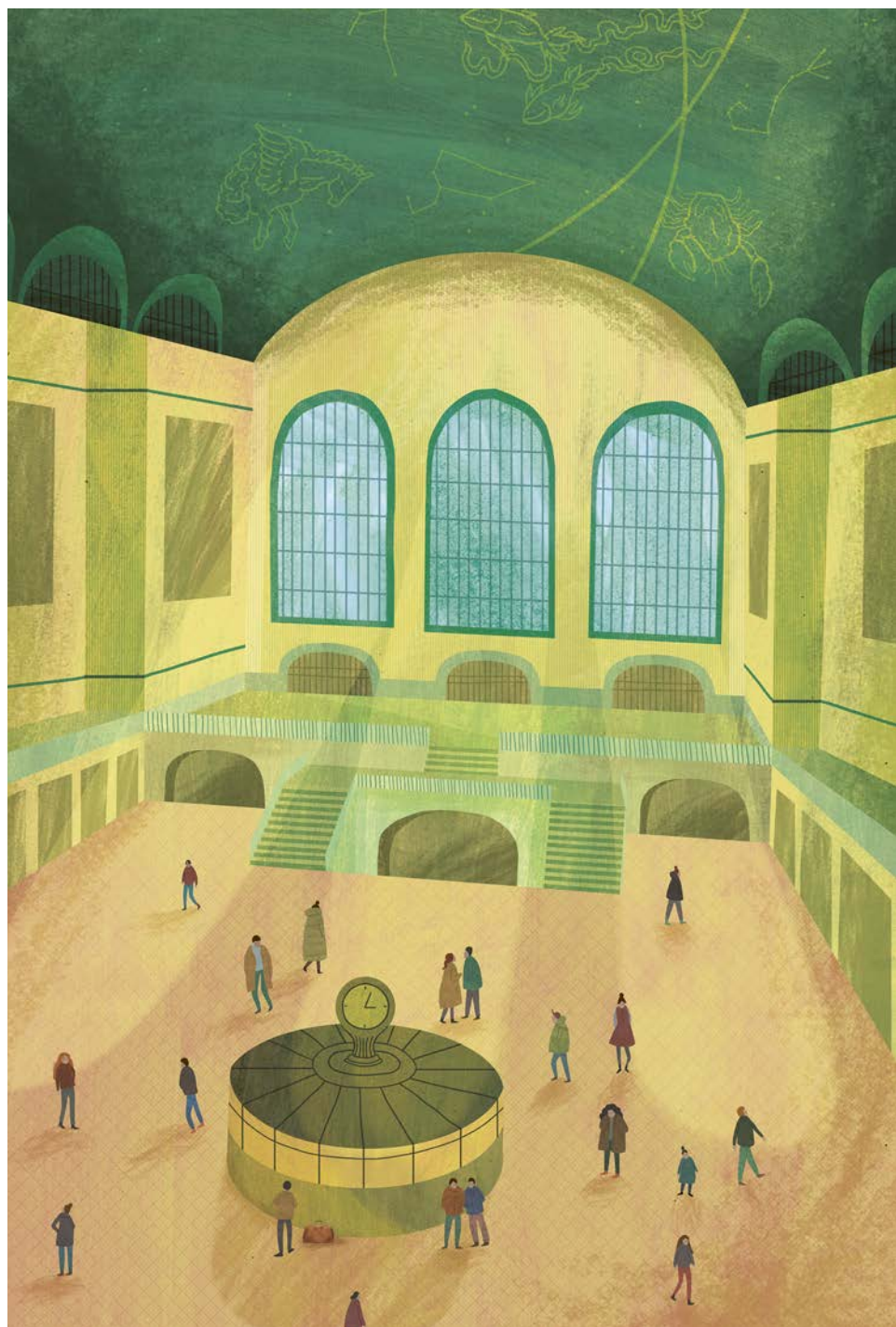
It's late one night, just before Christmas, when Holden arrives by train. Today's Penn Station is a rather perfunctory terminus, not a patch on the ornate beaux arts edifice that was pulled down in the 1960s. But still, exiting the station is to be spewed into mid-town Manhattan, straight into the melee. Stop for a moment in the sea of souls and immediately you get it: the sensation of feeling utterly alienated while surrounded by thousands of people.

Over the next couple of days, Holden moves around the city, a journey of experience and innocence. He checks in to the Edmont Hotel, with its prostitutes and perverts, and he takes a 'vomity' cab to Ernie's Jazz Bar, which is full 'phonies'. Neither establishment ever existed, though there are still basement jazz clubs in Greenwich Village where you can drink Scotch and soda in a dark corner into the small hours.

Holden hits plenty of real-life Manhattan haunts, too. He stows his Gladstone at Grand Central, still a striking terminus – though the left-luggage service has since been discontinued for security reasons. He jostles with the masses on 'mobbed and messy' Broadway; he takes his date ice skating at the Rockefeller Center rink (still open every winter); he watches a show at Radio City Music Hall, a vast venue narrowly saved from closure in the 1970s and now an official City Landmark. The book is set in December and, then as now, Fifth Avenue is a-sparkle with Christmas lights – which might incite festive cheer or an anti-consumerist rant, depending on your perspective.

Central Park is the book's principal location, and you can follow Holden's trail through this great green lung, first opened to provide escape for urbanites in 1858. The vintage carousel, like the one on which Holden watches his sister, is still spinning. Sea lions still swim at the zoo. The parkside Natural History and Met museums that Holden recalls so fondly remain relatively unchanged.

However, Holden's main preoccupation is with the ducks on the lagoon near Central Park South: when it freezes over, where do they go? The answer is nowhere. Wander around, wrapped against the chill, and you might see them, huddled in different parts of the park, adapting to survive. Just as Holden must adapt. Just as this great, glorious, notorious, intoxicating, indefatigable city has had to, too.



Which? *Cannery Row* by
John Steinbeck (1945)

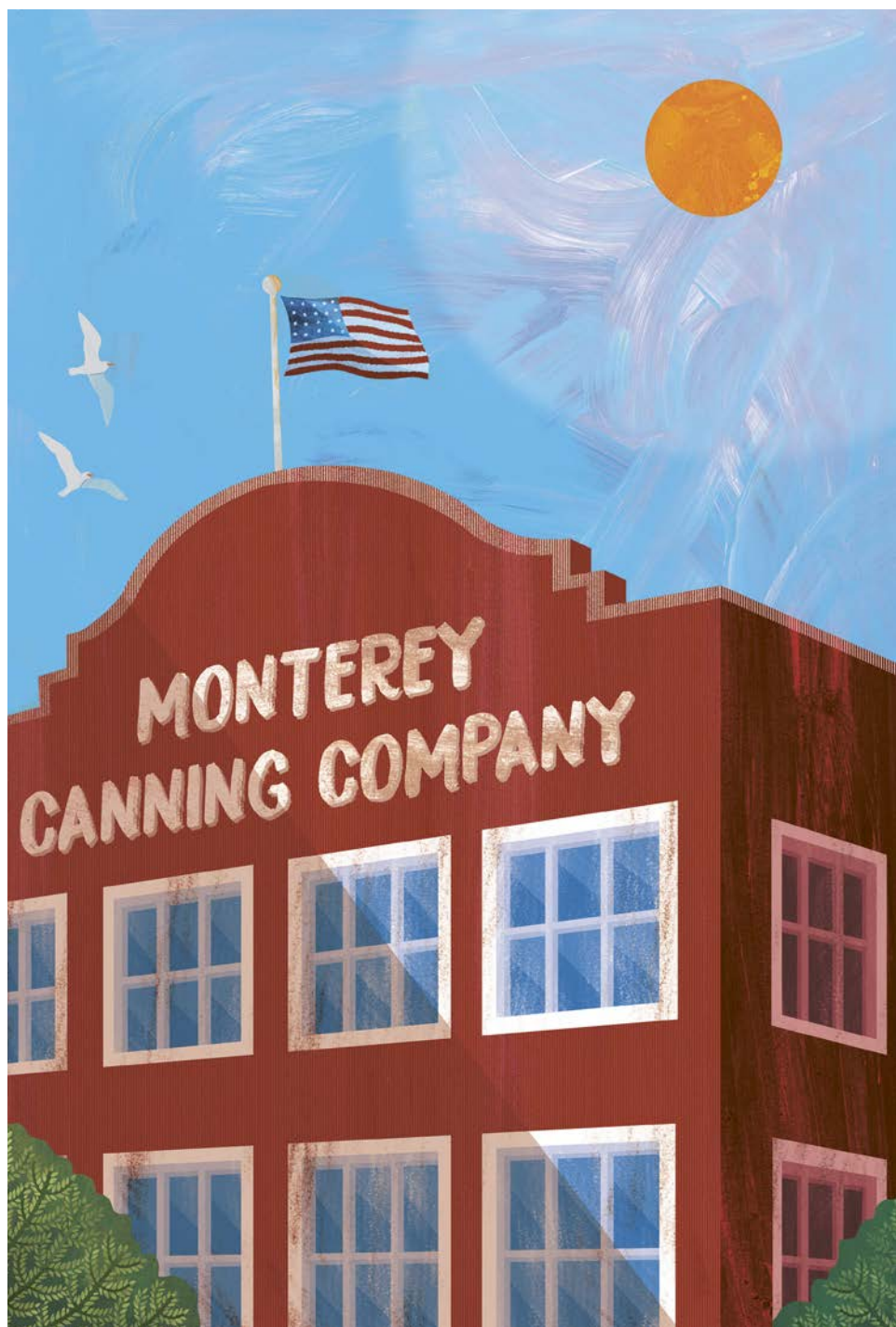
What? Ocean-side California
street where life at its
most colourful ebbs
and flows

MONTEREY

IN THE early, pearly morning, The Row begins to wake. Gulls start their vigils on corrugated-iron rooftops, waiting for trash to become lunch; sea lions bark like hunting dogs over the heave of the ocean. People stir; feet flip-flapping along the tidy sidewalk. A new cast of human characters thrives here now: trinket-shop keepers, aquarium cleaners, tourist dealers. The whole street spruced up for a huge new shoal: visitors in their millions. But back in the day, when the factories were grinding, empty lots lay under mallow weeds and the air reeked of rotten fish, it was a different troupe – vagrants, prostitutes, artists, idlers – who frequented this industrious neighbourhood by the sea. Like a human rock pool, Cannery Row was flow and vitality, colour and oddity, a discrete ecosystem of humanity striving to stay afloat ...

Cannery Row, a waterfront avenue in Monterey, California, is one of the most famous streets in America. John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, a little northeast of Monterey, in 1902, and set many of his works in this area of central California where the Coast Ranges and rich agricultural valleys – the ‘salad bowl of the States’ – meet the Pacific Ocean.

By 1930, Steinbeck had moved to Pacific Grove, close to Ocean View Avenue, aka Cannery Row. It was a street lined with noisy, stinking sardine canneries that processed the spoils of the nutrient-rich water offshore – for a time, one of the most productive fishing grounds in the world. The stock seemed inexhaustible, and huge purse-seiners with nets a quarter-mile long ravaged the ocean. This kept workers working during the Great Depression and fed needy







mouths during the Second World War. But by the mid-1950s, the sardine supply ran dry. The industry collapsed; the last cannery closed in 1973.

Published in 1945, but set in an indeterminate period before that, Steinbeck's eponymous novel remembers The Row with fond sentiment. There are no Nazis in these pages. Indeed, Steinbeck himself called *Cannery Row* a 'kind of nostalgic thing', penned for a group of soldiers who asked him to 'write something funny that isn't about the war'.

The resulting book is like a series of vivid portraits, showing life on The Row in all its odoriferous, eccentric, enterprising glory. The plot, such as it is, follows the exploits of Mack and the boys, a band of resourceful bums who doss in an empty fishmeal shack. Mack decides they should do something nice for Doc, the intellectual proprietor of a biological supplies lab, whom everybody loves – and who Steinbeck based on his close friend, marine biologist and philosopher Ed Ricketts.

The resulting party ends in disaster – but that's not really the point. The novel is less about action than atmosphere. And it oozes affection for this ramshackle street and those living upon it. These folks may be a motley crew of down-and-outs and chancers, but they are mostly heart-of-gold.

Today's Cannery Row – as Ocean View Avenue was officially renamed in 1958 – bears little resemblance to Steinbeck's. For him, the street was 'a poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream'. The light is still right – the golden California sun still flickers off the water and down the wharf, bathing the honking sea lions and the wooden piers. But it's all a lot tidier now. The stench has gone, and the defunct factories have been given new leases of life as fish restaurants, gift shops, candy stores and antiques boutiques.

In Steinbeck Plaza, halfway along The Row, a statue depicts some of the area's characters, including Steinbeck, Ed Ricketts and local brothel madam Flora Woods, who gave food to the poor during the Depression and provided inspiration for the novel's Dora Flood. Just off The Row near here are three Cannery Row Workers' Cabins, now little museums that give a glimpse of living conditions during the district's sardine fishing heyday.

Further along the street sit real-life buildings that Steinbeck weaved in. There's Wing Chong Market, which became Lee Chong's

Heavenly Flower Grocery where you could buy everything from silk kimonos to Old Tennis Shoes whiskey. There's also Austino's Patisserie, once the site of a bordello on which Steinbeck based his La Ida Café.

At No. 800 is Ed Ricketts' clapboard Pacific Biological Laboratories – inspiration for 'Doc's Lab'. Like Doc, Ricketts preserved marine specimens here, which were bought by institutions across the country. A public walkway leads to the rear where you can still see the concrete tanks where Ricketts kept his samples; the ocean beyond is now the Edward F. Ricketts State Marine Conservation Area. Ricketts was an intellectual with diverse interests and his lab became a gathering place for artists, musicians and writers. These days the building is mostly closed, though free public tours run once a month.

Even if Doc's isn't open, you can see plenty of marine specimens on the site of the former Hovden Cannery. Since 1984, this has been home to the Monterey Bay Aquarium, a groundbreaking, not-for-profit facility dedicated to marine conservation and education, with a focus on the wildlife of Monterey Bay. The aquarium is home to some 550-plus species, from sea turtles to huge shoals of glittering sardines. Millions of paying visitors come each year. So while times may have changed, it's still fish that bring the dollars to Cannery Row.





Which? *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain (1884)

What? Mighty waterway through the heart of America, brimming with adventure and social significance

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

SOMETIMES THIS river seems wide as an ocean. A great blue-grey expanse, slipping ever southwards from glacial lakes and tallgrass prairie to the sultry subtropics.

It makes a massive, meandering journey, but is a place for simple pleasures; where you can float away from your troubles. It's a place for lazing back, trailing a toe in the flow, and listening to the somnolent trickle. For eating mushmelon and corn dodgers, talking aimless flapdoodle. For gliding to the hum of mosquitoes. For gazing at a sky a-flicker with stars. The ancient river: an invitation to drift, an opportunity to escape ...

Ol' Man River, Big Muddy, Father of Waters. The Mississippi, a leviathan of many names, flows through the heart of America. It once served as the country's western border, and has long been key for trade and transportation. During the American Civil War (1861–1865), the river's capture by Union forces signalled a turn towards victory. In short, the Mississippi looms large in America's history, culture and consciousness. And it's central to Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Samuel Langhorne Clemens – pen name Mark Twain – was born in Florida, Missouri, in 1835 but moved to nearby Hannibal, on the Mississippi's west bank, in 1839. He was raised in antebellum America, a time of growth and expansion, thriving plantations and goods-laden steamboats; as a young man, Twain even worked as a riverboat pilot, gaining intimacy with the Mississippi's many twists, turns and eddies.

This was also a time of slavery. Unlike Illinois, across the river, Missouri, was not a free state; by the mid-19th century, a quarter of



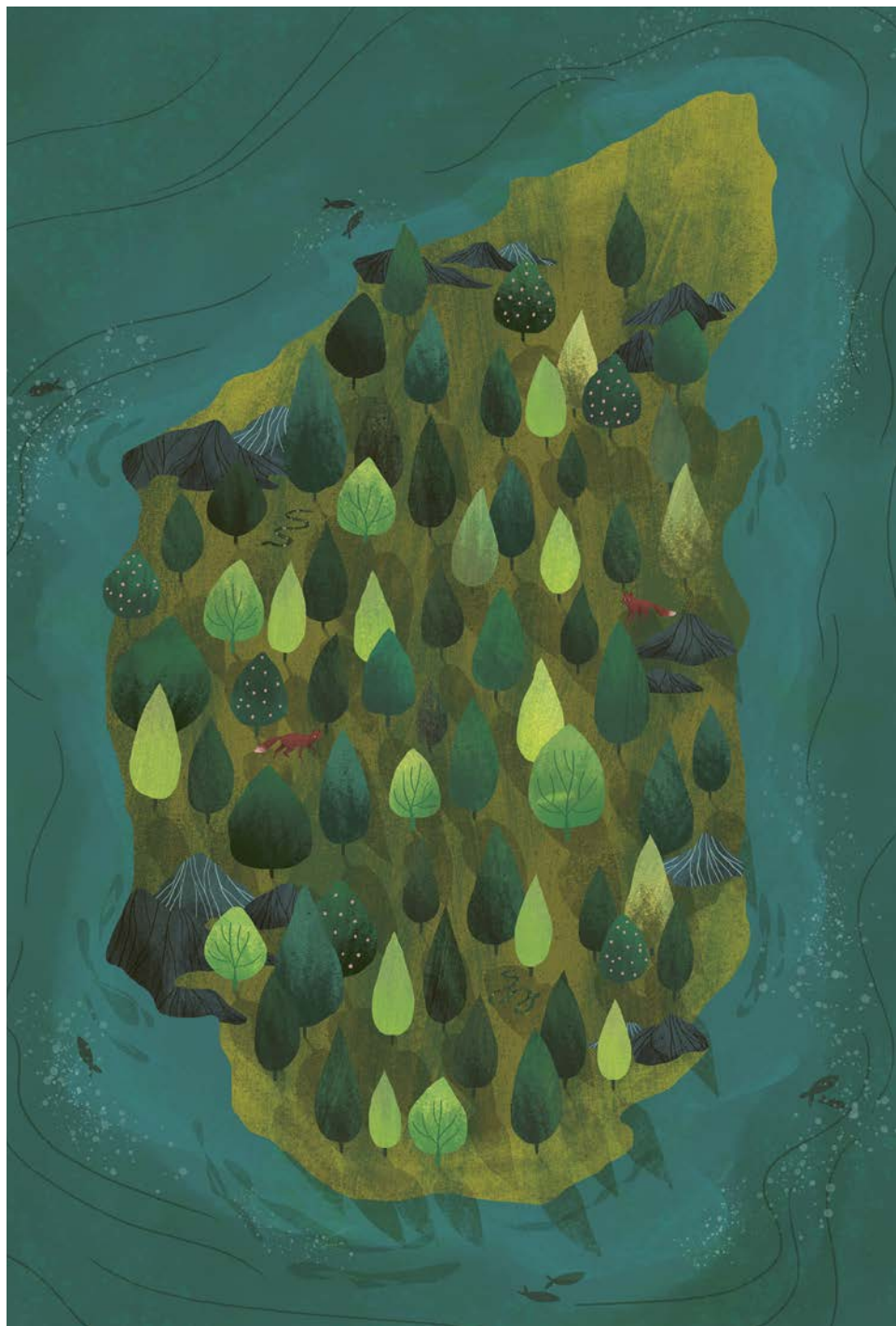
Hannibal County's population were slaves. While *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was published two decades after the 1865 Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery, the novel is set in the 1840s. And Twain's novel – at first glance, a simple boy's own adventure – is a blistering examination of American attitudes to race at the time.

The novel follows the exploits of teenage vagabond Huck Finn and Jim, a black adult slave. Both live in the Missouri town of St Petersburg and both want to escape incarceration. Huck is running from his abusive, alcoholic Pap and the constraints of 'civilized' society – the hand-washin', meal times and starchy britches that have been inflicted on him. Jim is fleeing slavery. So the pair strike out together, intending to raft to the free state of Illinois. Their drifting comes at a cost – they lose their raft, witness a massacre, encounter burglars and murderers. But despite all this, the wandering river provides the ultimate prize: freedom. Unlike life ashore, it's not 'cramped up and smothery'. Once they're sliding down the Mississippi, it's as if they exist beyond society's normal rules. On the water, a white boy and a black man can float together, talking as equals.

Academics argue over Twain's stance on race. Some see the novel as a scathing attack on prejudice; others condemn its repeated use of the word 'nigger' and feel it stereotypes black people. But it remains one of the most important works of American literature, as well as a rich evocation of the mid-19th-century Midwest.

To get a taste of Twain's Americana, head to his one-time hometown of Hannibal, on which fictional St Petersburg is heavily based. The heart of the riverside town remains largely intact, its gridded historic centre lined with old-fashioned drugstores and taverns, as well as the old Clemens' house, now the Mark Twain Boyhood Home & Museum. You can also soak up the scenery that inspired Huck's adventures – the sandbanks, the old mansions, the lazy river views – and board a replica paddle steamer for a journey on the Mississippi.

A few miles south of Hannibal is Jackson's Island, where Huck and Jim meet up and forge one of the most monumental friendships in American literature – a mixed-race mate-ship in an era when this was rare indeed. The narrow, wooded island is still uninhabited, aside from the muskrats, turtles and beavers. And it's still an ideal spot to play, hide, lark, tumble and watch the timeless river glide by.



Which? *To Kill a Mockingbird* by
Harper Lee (1960)

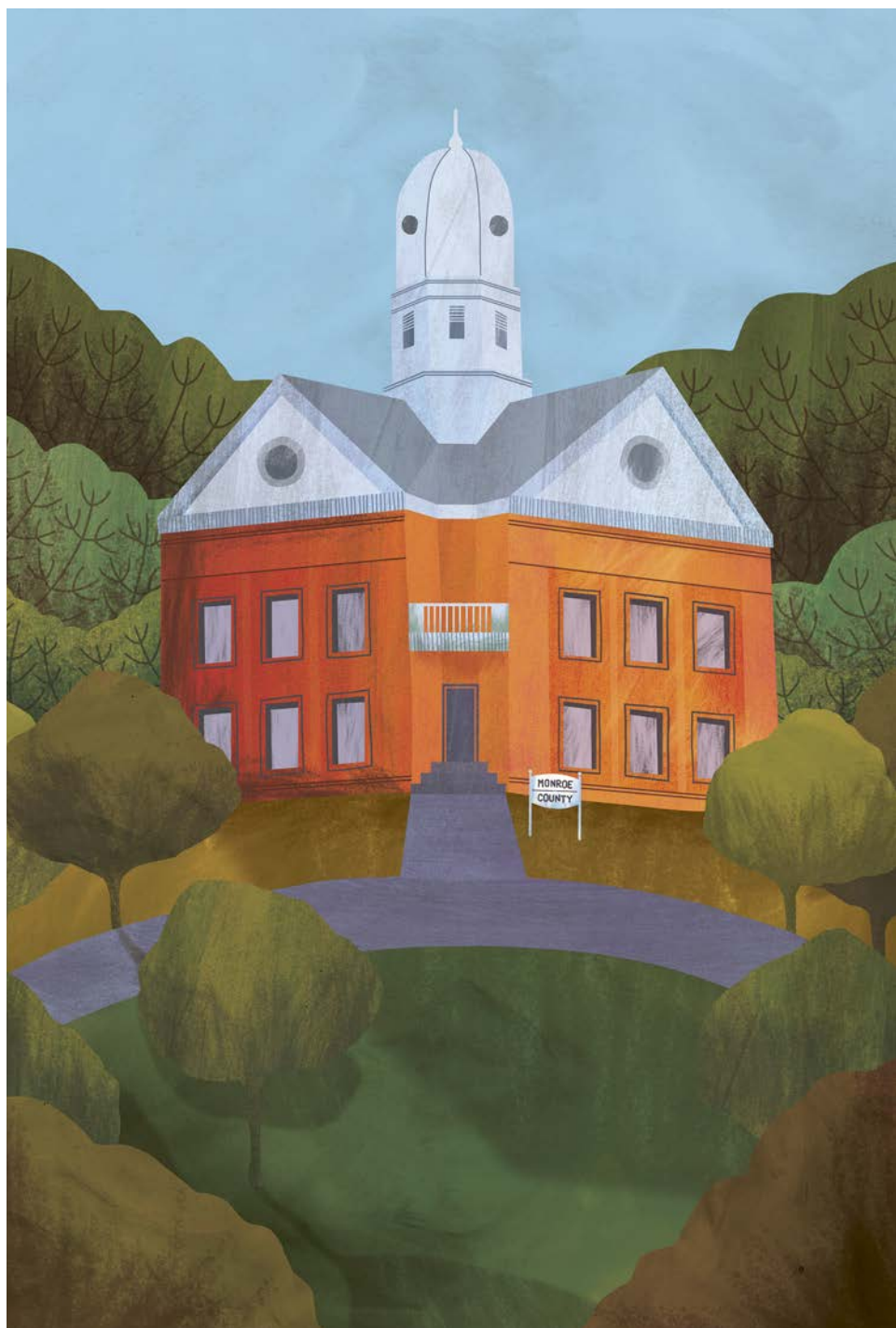
What? Deep South US town
that inspired a simple tale
of racial heroism

MONROEVILLE

NO ONE'S in a hurry in this tired old town. Maybe it's the heat – the Alabama summer is stultifying, sticky as molasses. It would be swell to swing on a porch all afternoon with an icy Coca-Cola. But this bench under the main square's live oaks and magnolias will do just fine. Folk pass by, strolling between the Christian bookshop, the thrift store and the fine old County Courthouse, its white dome dazzling under the sun. No case has been tried here for decades; indeed, its most famous case wasn't tried here at all. But it remains a potent symbol of justice all the same ...

Harper Lee's classic, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, delivered the right message in the right tone at the right moment. A simple tale of prejudice, unjustness and morality, it was published in 1960, just as the American South faced its biggest social shift since the Civil War. The equality movement was gaining momentum; deeply entrenched attitudes to race and class were being challenged. Alabama saw some of the highest-profile acts. It was in Montgomery in 1955 that Rosa Parks refused to surrender her bus seat to a white passenger. In 1956, anti-integration riots erupted when Autherine Lucy and Polly Myers became the first African-American students to be admitted to the state's university.

Though set in 1930s Alabama, during the Great Depression, *To Kill a Mockingbird* matched the mood of the sixties, and gave voice to the fears and frustrations of this transitional period. It showed the country it needed a conscience and offered an unimpeachable hero: Atticus Finch – single parent, lawyer, 'the bravest man who ever lived'. Atticus, the father of child narrator Scout, defends Tom







Robinson, an innocent black man, against charges of raping a white woman. Atticus knows he is destined to fail, but he proceeds with the case nonetheless.

The Finch family live in Maycomb, technically a fictional place but so modelled on the author's home of Monroeville that the two inevitably merge – the footsteps of Harper Lee and Atticus Finch lead the same way. Maycomb is an isolated, insular, hard-scrabble town, steeped in Southern values. Monroeville is similarly out on a limb, similarly Southern-hospitable, similarly facing testing times. Its former clay streets – 'red slop' in the rain – have been paved but the population is low and falling (currently 6,000 or so) and there's a slight air of decrepitude around the old square, where many businesses have closed. However, its cultural impact has not faded.

Monroeville's literal and literary heart is the County Courthouse. Completed in 1904, this Romanesque clock-towered seat of justice was used until 1963. Attorney A.C. Lee fought many cases here, with daughter Nelle Harper Lee watching from the balcony. In the 1970s the building was almost demolished. But it was surreptitiously placed on the National Register of Historic Places and saved. Restored to its 1930s glory, the Courthouse is now a museum where you can sit in the judge's chair, climb to the 'coloreds' balcony' and, each spring, watch the *Mockingbird* play, which recreates the novel's action in situ.

A circuit of the square passes the two-storey Monroe County Bank Building (inside which A.C. Lee once practised law) and the tiny jailhouse – 'a miniature Gothic joke' – where the likes of Tom Robinson were once interred; it's now an annex to the Sheriff's Department. Alabama Avenue leads from the square's southeast corner. A little way down, past the car parks and uninspiring office buildings, is Mel's Dairy Dream, a small retro drive-thru selling burgers and shakes. This was the site of Lee's childhood home, torn down in 1953. Next door, a low brick wall is all that's left of the Faulk house, where a young Truman Capote would stay while visiting his Monroeville cousins, and where Truman and Nelle Harper became lifelong friends.

According to Atticus, 'You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view ... Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.' Visiting Monroeville lets you walk a little with Harper Lee.



Which? *Love in the Time of Cholera* by Gabriel García Márquez (1985)

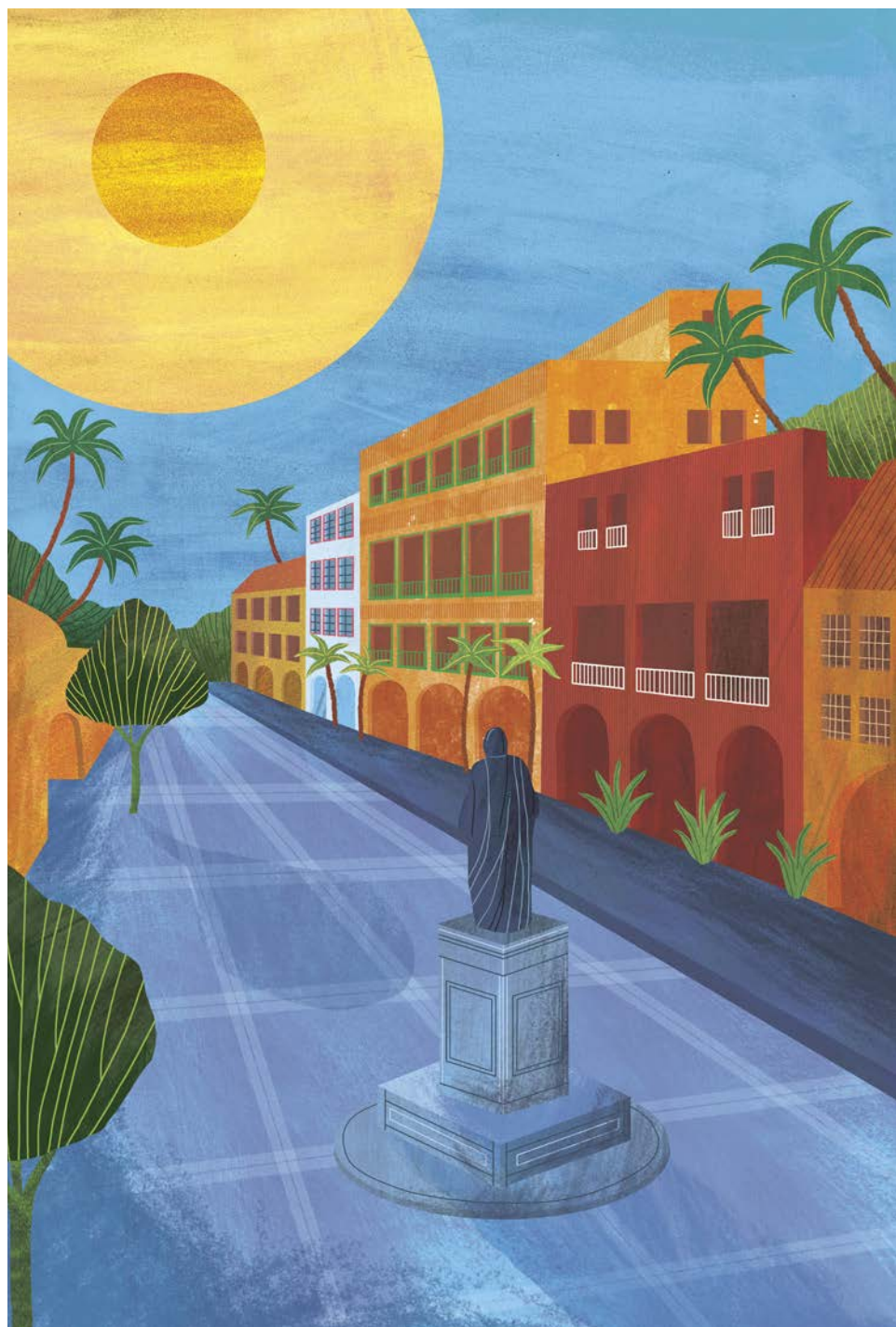
What? Colonial Caribbean-lapped city in Colombia where magic is made real

CARTAGENA

THE CITY is steaming. The downpour has stopped and now the temperature's high as hell, the air hanging heavy with humidity, jasmine, birdsong and expectation. Yellow-red-pink walls burn in the sun. It seems barely a city at all but a lurid painting created in a fever dream; blurred brightness, hidden meanings. The shade of the square provides little escape. You're still assaulted by the Caribbean heat, by the sound of heels clattering the cobblestones, by pecking pigeons, hawkers touting Cuban cigars, the sickly smooch of lovers. A hot breeze blows through, carrying not respite but stories – stories from out at sea, from the cannon-topped battlements, from behind closed shutters, from centuries past. Cartagena: a city of stories, where magic dances down every street ...

Gabriel García Márquez was born in the Colombian river town of Aracataca, lived peripatetically between Europe, Cuba and Mexico City but is inextricably linked with Cartagena. He arrived in the coastal city in 1948, just as La Violencia – a ten-year civil war – broke across the country. He studied at Cartagena University, and worked as a newspaper reporter, but left after only a year, never to live there full time again. And yet, this city – its palette, its pulse – infuses his writing. Márquez once confessed that 'all of my books have loose threads of Cartagena in them'.

This is never more apparent than in *El Amor en los Tiempos del Cólera* – *Love in the Time of Cholera*. The novel, based on the love affair of Márquez's parents, is set in the 'city of the Viceroy', a port on the Magdalena River somewhere near the Caribbean Sea – unnamed by the author but oozing with the essence of Cartagena.







The streets and squares are fictitious, but wandering the real-life city it's impossible not to see the stage of Márquez's love story: that of odd young romantic Florentino Ariza and his sweetheart Fermina Daza. After one 'casual glance' at 14-year-old Fermina, Florentino falls impossibly in love. He stalks Fermina across the city, mounting a vigil outside her half-ruined house, going places she might be, playing violin to her in church. When Fermina marries staid, respectable Dr Juvenal Urbino instead, Florentino continues to lurk around the city – on trams, down alleys, by the docks – racking up hundreds of sexual encounters while still proclaiming fidelity to Fermina. He waits 51 years, 9 months and 4 days to win her back.

Cartagena was founded by the Spanish in 1533. It was a literal treasure chest, used to store looted New World gold and silver before it was shipped back to Europe. The Spanish wrapped the city in sturdy ramparts to fend off attacks from buccaneers and Brits; these protective *murallas* (walls) were bolstered over subsequent centuries, becoming the most extensive fortifications in South America. Today, they continue to safeguard the Old Town's cluster of handsome churches, bright-hued houses, tropical courtyards and terracotta tiles. It's a confined, candy-coloured bubble, where magic might brew.

Cartagena is in better shape now than when Márquez arrived. The state of ruination, when 'weeds hung from the balconies and opened cracks in the whitewashed walls of even the best-kept mansions' has been reversed. Long known for guerrilla fighting, drugs trafficking and corruption, Colombia has cleaned up its act in the early 21st century. In Cartagena, houses have been restored and weeds replaced by tamed creepers and neat window boxes.

Indeed, the Old Town is as colourful, sensual and multi-sensory as Márquez's imagination. *Cumbia* music pumps from bars and spills into the streets. Food is everywhere, from rainbow-bright lollipops to fried snacks sizzling in vats of hot oil on the pavements. Dark-skinned *palerqueras*, descendants of the first free slaves, sashay in their vibrant full-skirted dresses and costume jewels, balancing bowls overflowing with tropical fruit on their heads. They'll pose for photos in exchange for tourist dollars. But then, the whole city is photogenic, from the elegant wrought-iron lampposts to the balconies dripping with bougainvillea. Flowers of all kinds – roses, gardenias, camellias – symbolise love in Márquez's novel, and flourish in abundance on the real streets of Cartagena.

It's possible to seek out Florentino and Fermina. Entering the Old Town via the main gate, walking under the clock tower, you enter the Plaza de los Coches, once used as a slave market. Across the square is the Portal de los Dulces, the colonnaded and tangerine-hued passageway that became Márquez's Portal de los Escribanos, or Arcade of the Scribes. Florentino, rejected by Fermina, employed his literary powers here, writing missives for 'unlettered lovers', free of charge. You won't find poets under the shade of the arches today, but rather a line of little stalls selling a tooth-stinging array of sweet confections: sugary pastries, caramel swirls, glass jars jammed with *muñecas de leche* (milk dolls) and coconut *cocada* sweets.

A little further north is leafy Plaza Fernández de Madrid, inspiration for the Parquecito de los Evangelios – the Little Park of the Evangelists – where love-lorn Florentino spent many hours, hoping to glimpse Fermina. There are benches where you can sit, like Florentino, 'pretending to read a book of verse in the shade of the almond trees'. The Daza house was supposedly based on the white, vine-smothered mansion on the square's eastern side.

Just like Márquez's fictional city, Cartagena is a cauldron in which magic can brew. Where love can explode, colours can blind, parrots can kill. It is lyrical, vibrant, sweet and strange. It has, as Dr Urbino states, 'no equal in the world'.

Which? *The House of the Spirits*
by Isabel Allende (1982)

What? Mysterious Latin nation
terrorised by dictators
and laced with magic

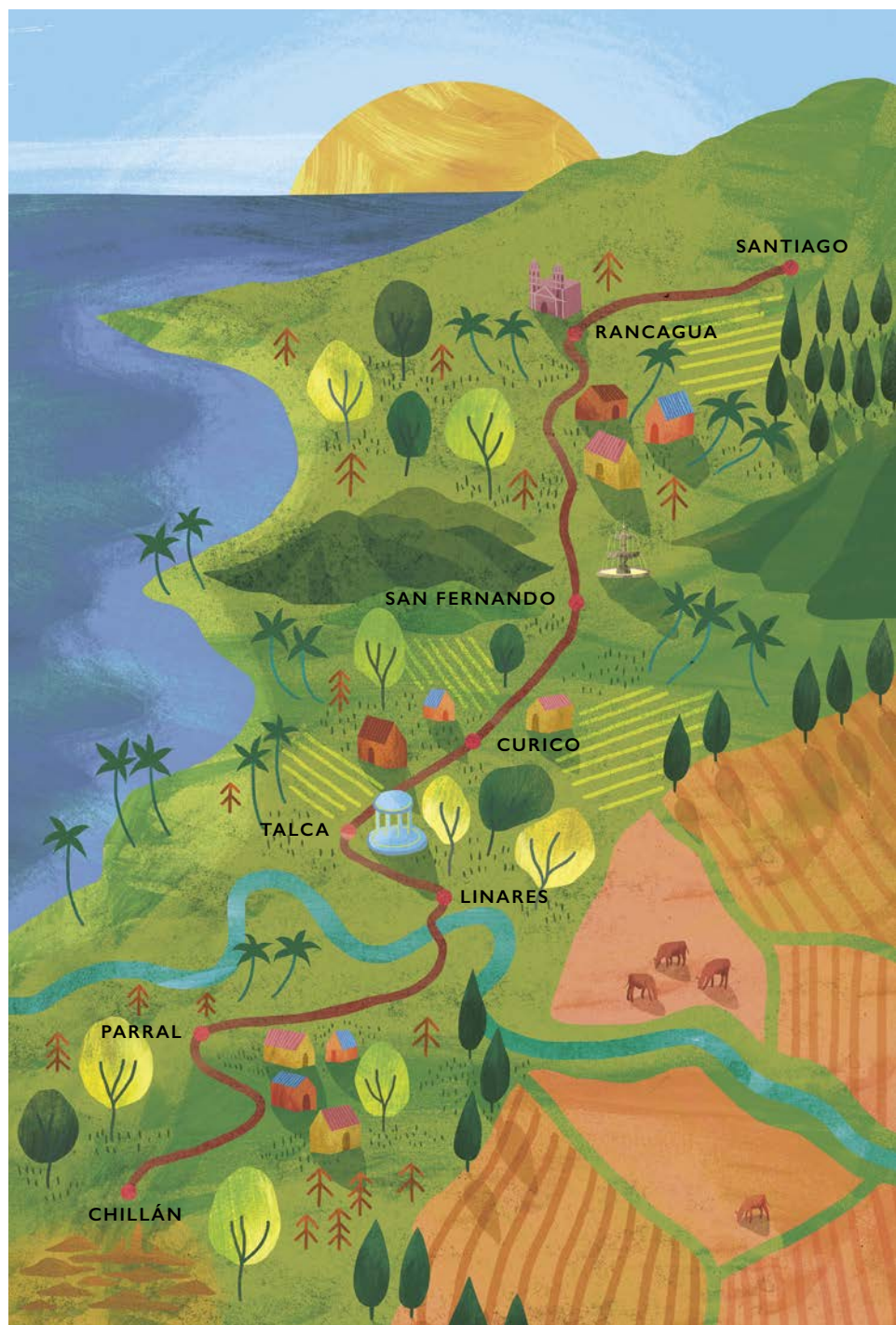
CHILE

THE LANDSCAPE seems but a dream; a hazy memory. The shrouded sky part conceals the fruitful valley, with its twisted vines, dashing stream, distant mountains; only the snow-slathered peak of a volcano

stands proud and clear. A vast *estancia* – a huge swathe of hopeful farmland – lays vague claim to this patch of wildness, but remains at the mercy of Mother Nature in this half-forgotten country at the end of the earth ...

Though its location is never stated, *La Casa de los Espíritus* – *The House of the Spirits* – breathes Chile. Author Isabel Allende declined to place her story of three generations of the Trueba family; it plays out in an unnamed country in Latin America. But despite its magic-realist flights of fancy and geographic unspecificity, there's little question of the setting. The novel is part personal saga, part document of the country's 20th-century history.

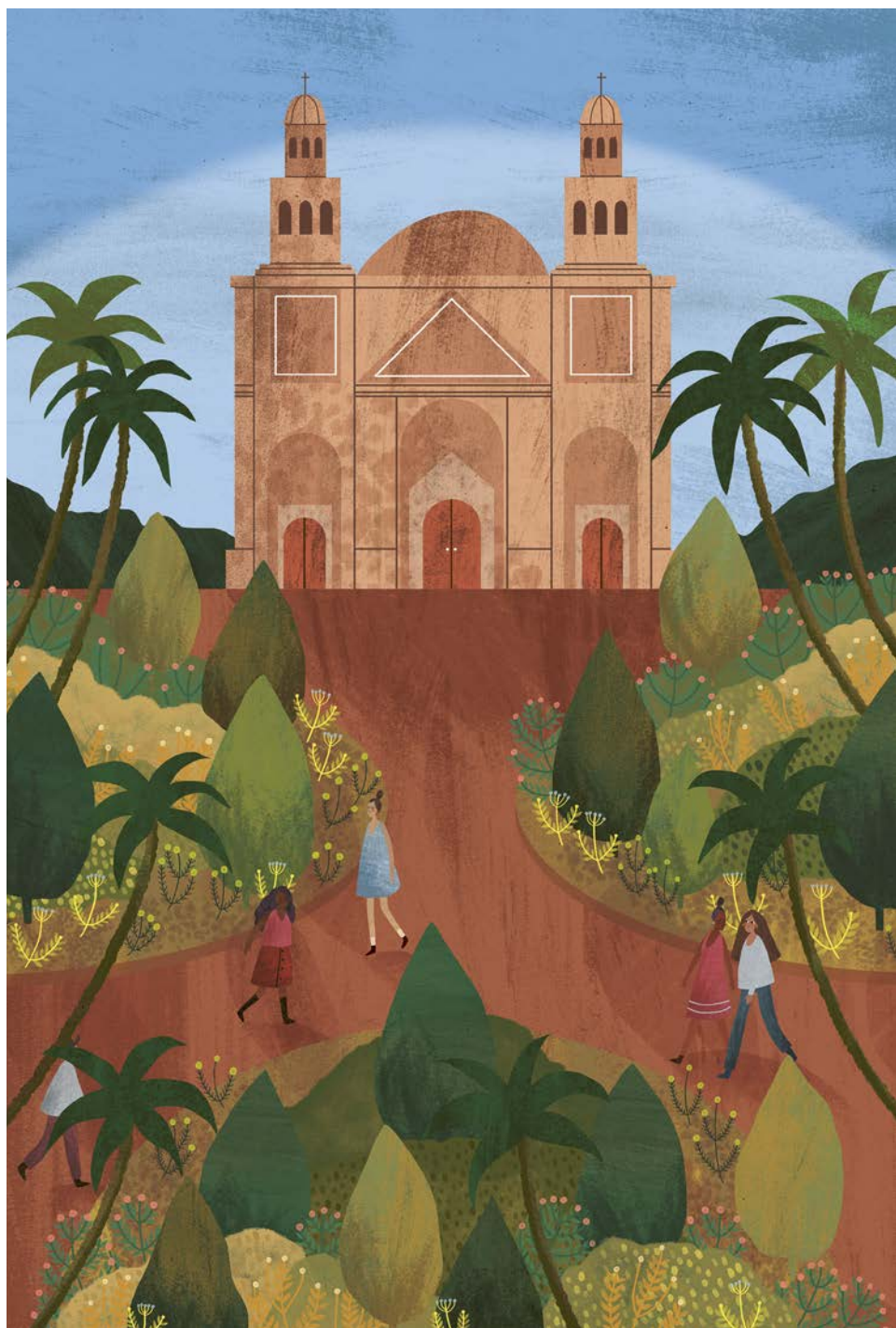
Allende has admitted as much; she once said that in writing *The House of the Spirits*, she 'wanted to recover all that I had lost – my land, my family, my memories'. The Chilean author had spent long periods of her early life living in Santiago. But when the military coup of 1973 saw the toppling of President Salvador Allende – the world's first democratically elected Marxist president and Isabel's first cousin once removed – she fled to Venezuela. *The House of the Spirits*, which began life as a letter to her dying grandfather, was written while the author was in exile and her homeland – 'that country of catastrophes' – was in the grip of Augusto Pinochet's brutal dictatorship.



The novel begins around 1920, at a time when Chilean politics were in flux. It spans more than 50 years and two main locations: the 'big house on the corner', in the centre of the nameless capital, and Tres Marías, the Trueba's countryside estate. Real events creep into the narrative. The earthquake that tears down Tres Marías and saw 'buildings fall like wounded dinosaurs' echoes the 1939 earthquake that devastated Chile, killed nearly 30,000 people and yet caused limited international stir: 'the rest of the world, too busy with another war, barely noticed that nature had gone berserk in that remote corner of the globe'. Politics are ever present too – from issues of women's rights and socialism to the build-up to the coup. But there's also joy and beauty, from the conjured spirits, to the girl with the long green hair to the wild expanses of the sun-baked *campo* (countryside).

As Allende doesn't name her country, it's impossible to follow a Trueba trail with precision. But you might start in Santiago's Plaza de Armas – the name of many a Latin city's main square – where violent patriarch Esteban Trueba first sees 'Rosa the Beautiful' buying liquorice, and where you can stroll past the palm trees, chess players and towers of the Neoclassical cathedral. You could visit the museum at Las Chascona, former house of Pablo Neruda, who 'appears' in the novel simply as the Poet, or the Museum of Memory and Human Rights, which commemorates victims of the Pinochet regime. You might even explore the Brasil and Yungay *barrios* (municipalities), where the wealthy built fine mansions in the 19th and 20th centuries – less eccentric versions, perhaps, of the twisted, protuberance-encrusted house where clairvoyant Clara Trueba spoke to spirits.

Then, like Esteban, you could leave the metropolis. The Chilean train network has shrunk to a handful of lines, but the southbound service from Santiago's Gustave Eiffel-designed Alameda Station still offers an escape into the *campo*. Through the window of the train, Esteban watches 'the passing landscape of the central valley. Vast fields stretched from the foot of the mountain range, a fertile countryside filled with vineyards, wheatfields, alfalfa and marigolds'. Similarly, the long, thin plain south of Santiago, flanked by the Andes and the coastal range, is Chile's most fertile region. This rural riot of orchards, pastures and grape-heavy vines – where horse-drawn carts still clop along the highway – is just the place to imagine Tres Marías appearing on the horizon.



SARAH BAXTER grew up in Norfolk, England and now lives in Bath. Her passion for travel and the great outdoors saw her traverse Asia, Australia, New Zealand and the United States before settling into a writing career.

She was Associate Editor of *Wanderlust* magazine, the bible for independent-minded travellers, for more than ten years and has also written extensively on travel for a diverse range of other publications, including the *Guardian*, the *Telegraph* and the *Independent* newspapers. Sarah has contributed to more than a dozen Lonely Planet guidebooks and is the author of the first book in the *Inspired Traveller's Guide* series, *Spiritual Places*, as well as *A History of the World in 500 Walks* and *A History of the World in 500 Railway Journeys*.

AMY GRIMES is an illustrator based in London. Drawing inspiration from nature and the natural world, Amy's work often features bright and bold illustrated motifs, floral icons and leafy landscapes. As well as working on commissioned illustrations, Amy also sells prints, textiles and stationery under the brand of Hello Grimes.



INSPIRED TRAVELLER'S GUIDE



Explore the landscapes and places that inspired great novels: travel to the sun-scorched plains of Don Quixote's La Mancha, roam the wild Yorkshire moors with Cathy and Heathcliff, or view Central Park through the eyes of J.D. Salinger's antihero.

With beautiful illustrations and insightful stories, this unique book will instantly transport you to literary destinations around the globe, whether that's the lush and languid backwaters of Arundhati Roy's Kerala, the imposing precipice of Joan Lindsay's Hanging Rock or the labyrinthine streets and sewers of Victor Hugo's Paris.

The places collected here are not just backdrops to the tales told, they are characters in their own right – so delve into this book to discover some of the world's most fascinating literary places and the novels that celebrate them.



Cover illustration:
Amy Grimes

ISBN 978-1-78131-810-2



9 781781 318102

www.QuartoKnows.com

£14.99
US \$19.99
CAN \$26.99



**WHITE LION
PUBLISHING**